

Dawn

by NovaTyrant

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Summary: The Master Chief finds himself stranded on a strange new world filled with odd new allies and deadly new enemies. As he attempts to find a way back home, dark forces begin their quest for utter domination, content with the knowledge that nothing from their world can stop them. Rated T for light swearing, relationships, and mild violence.

1. Chapter 1

****Hello.** I'm NovaTyrant. I've read a lot of fanfiction on this site, and I've noticed that there are almost no League of Legends " Halo crossovers on this site. Actually, there are none, I think, so I decided to write one myself. This is my first time writing fanfiction, so I would appreciate any constructive criticism/reviews/hates/etc. Hopefully less of the hates. This chapter is a little bit long and dull, because it's kinda like a Pilot/Prologue chapter. If there is any interest in this story, I'll continue writing this. If not, meh. So" Onwards?"

****DISCLAIMER:** I do not own League of Legends or Halo. I'm not rich."

* * *

><p>Chapter 1 " Dawn<p>

Caitlyn was painstakingly going through the stack of reports on her desk that she had been putting off for the last couple of days. While she enjoyed working and enjoyed her job, filling out and filing away reports was something she never liked. Still, she understood the necessity of it, and so she never really complained. Not that there was anyone she could complain to " she was Sheriff. Kind of hard to complain to herself.

And so, it was when Caitlyn was on the sixteenth report in the stack

of nearly one hundred that the Piltover Enforcer decided to slam open the Sheriff's office door and barge in uninvited.

"Cupcake, have you looked outside?" Vi asked, looking more agitated than usual. Or maybe that was how she usually was. Caitlyn was too busy to really care, anyways.

"No, I have not. I happen to be working, in case you haven't noticed. I recommend you do the same", Caitlyn answered sharply, massaging her temples. Vi always choose the worst times to bother her.

Naturally, Vi ignored her and went to open the blinds that covered the office's single window. Caitlyn always worked with the blinds down. It helped increase productivity.

"Tell me what you see," she asked, not looking at the Sheriff.

Caitlyn squinted out the window, not noticing anything immediately wrong. People were on the streets, looking at the sunrise as the red light of dawn made the horizon glow. "wait. It was two in the afternoon. There was no sunrise at two, so there should be no red glow" that's the moment that Caitlyn realized something was very, very wrong.

Caitlyn approached the window, and Vi moved beside, looking up. Caitlyn followed her gaze, and found the object causing this second sunrise.

It was big, massive " larger than anything she had ever seen in the skies before. It was wreathed in a ball of flame. It was also falling towards Piltover.

As soon as she noticed that, Caitlyn turned away and moved to the hextech phone that rested on her desk. She began to make calls, ordering police units and firefighter teams around based on her quick in-head calculations of the objects trajectory. She also called the police stations logistics office, asking them to get an accurate estimation of where the object would land.

Vi just stood by the window the entire time Caitlyn made her calls. She couldn't read anything from Vi's body language, which was unusual.

As soon as Caitlyn finished her last call, she scooped up her rifle, pulled back the bolt to make sure there was a bullet in the chamber, and slung it around her back.

"What do you think it is?" asked Vi suddenly, without turning around. Caitlyn new she would never ask her so abrupt a question unless she had been thinking it over for some time, and Vi never thought things over. Bad sign.

"I don't really now. It does have the general shape of a missile, though, doesn't it?" Caitlyn responded, thinking it was perhaps an attack on Piltover.

Again, Vi answered quickly. "I don't think so. It's falling way too slowly. And it's on friggin fire. It must have fallen from, like, really, really high up. I didn't think anything could even get that

high."

There was something in Vi's voice that Caitlyn didn't like. It was more than agitation, it was "damnit, she couldn't place it. If it had been anyone other than Vi, she would have said fear, but Vi wasn't scared of the unknown. She decide to put it down paranoia.

Vi looked back at her, and Caitlyn realized she was waiting for an answer. Just as She prepared to say something reassuring "or at least what she thought was reassuring - there was a knock at the still-open door.

Caitlyn turned and saw Staff Sergeant Derrick, holding several pieces of paper.

"Wow, if it isn't the big boy himself," said Vi with a smirk. Derrick chose to ignore the comment while Caitlyn just shoot Vi a scathing look.

"Sheriff, this is the trajectory Logistics came up with," Derrick said, handing Caitlyn the papers. "It seems that the thing is going to overshoot Piltover and land just inside the Piltover Bay, by Dandy Jims' docks."

Shenodded, seeing that the papers did indeed match what Derrick said.

"We will need to call the docks and tell them to evacuate. And we'll need to redirect any units close by," Caitlyn said, placing the papers on her desk. After a second of consideration, she decided to pocket a few more magazines for her rifle.

Derrick smiled. "I've already got that covered," he said. "I called the docks, and it seems that it was maintenance day for them. If we're lucky, only some fish will get hurt."

"Poor fish," Vi mumbled, adjusting her gauntlets.

Caitlyn chose to ignore this comment also, knowing that Vi was just trying to be annoying.

"Thank you, Staff Sergeant. Get a squad car and two officers and meet us out front. We'll head down there ourselves," said Caitlyn.

Vi looked at Caitlyn as Derrick left.

"Why the hell are we going down there?" she asked, clearly disturbed by the prospect.

"Well," Caitlyn began, trying to think of a reason that Vi would accept, "If this IS an attack, and there ARE bad guys there, we would need to deal with them, no?"

Vi smiled.

* * *

><p>The first thing She noticed was how large the thing was. It towered a couple of hundred meters above her, and that was just the tip of the iceberg. Literally. The rest of the object was

underwater.<p>

"Damn, that thing is huge," exclaimed Vi. Caitlyn silently agreed with that assessment. Nothing in Valoran ever got that big.

Caitlyn looked around, noting the various officers setting up a perimeter. Already there were civilians gathering, trying to see the fallen object. None of them seemed nervous about having the giant block in the middle of the bay, but then again, nothing bad had happened yet.

She approached one of her sergeants, who was currently organizing a group of firefighters. She patiently waited for him to finish before tapping him on the shoulder.

He spun around. If he was nervous at his Sheriff's sudden appearance, he didn't show it

"Sheriff," he greeted, before jumping straight into business. "The entire area has been secured, and nothing seems to have come out of the object. The object is made of some form of metal, and could possibly be a building of some sort. There are rows of tubes on its sides â€" possibly weapons of an unknown type. There is also lettering on the side, F- O â€" R â€" W â€" A â€" R â€" D, space, U â€" N â€" T â€" O, space, D â€" A â€" W â€" N."

The Sergeant paused, allowing his Sheriff to make sense of what he told her. Caitlyn ran possibilities through her head â€" if this was an attack, enemies would have stormed out and

secured a beach head. If this was a weapon, it would have exploded, and not missed the city. If this was a building, then it would not have fallen from the sky.

"And one more thing," the Sergeant added, "The building also landed on the edge of the bay shelf. There is a possibility that it will slide to the bottom of the bay."

Caitlyn grimaced. If the object fell, then it would be next to impossible to search it properly. Caitlyn dismissed the Sergeant and turned back to Vi, only to see her arguing withâ€| a Yordle?

Caitlyn walked as fast as she could, silently praying Vi would not punch the Yordle.

"Would you just shut up?" asked Vi in a voice that was slightly lower than a shout. "Or I'll make you"

"Vi, we do not punch good people. Bad people, yes. Good people, no. Remember?" Caitlyn said, slightly mockingly.

"I'm not five, cupcake," Vi answered hotly.

Caitlyn looked down at the yordle, preparing to apologize for Vi's rude behaviour, but stopped when she realized who the Yordle was.

"Professor Heimerdinger?" She asked, slightly confused. She was aware that Heimerdinger was in town, but how had he gotten here so quickly?

"Hello Sheriff! You're just the person I have been looking for. I tried to ask your partner as to your whereabouts, but she was unable to respond to my query due to her substandard intelligence," Heimerdinger exclaimed.

Vi just blinked, unsure if she had just been insulted or not.

"Cupcake, did he just insult me?" she asked.

Caitlyn ignored her, focusing on Heimerdinger instead. "What brings you down here, professor?"

"Shorty, did you just insult me?" Vi asked Heimerdinger, looking agitated.

"Why, I'm here to investigate the Object, of course!" The Professor exclaimed, clearly excited. He took out some sort of box, and began brandishing it around. "My HexScandongler G-2 has detected a treasure trove of technology onboard, but no hextech signals! It's unprecedented! Remarkable! It must be studied immediately!"

Caitlyn thought about that for a few moments. If Heimerdinger was right about there being new technology on inside the Object, then time was even more of a factor than before.

"Vi," Caitlyn said. "Go ask Staff Sergeant Derrick to find us an entrance into that big metal box. We're going in".

"I could always just make us a door, cupcake"

"Vi, please. I'd rather search the thing while its still in one piece"

Vi smirked, then grew serious, "okay, I'm on it. But seriously, did he insult me?"

* * *

><p>It really didn't take long at all to find an entrance. There were several small doors on one of the sides of the metal box. A police gunboat carried Caitlyn, Vi, Heimerdinger, several police officers and a few of Heimerdinger's scientists there. In a matter of moments the passengers were disembarked and entered the Object.<p>

Vi slipped past Caitlyn, taking point. The rest of the officers were in the back. The hallway they walked through dark, but not enough that it was impossible to see. The floor was actually metal grating, and Caitlyn could see wires and tubes running beneath it.

They walked the length of the corridor until they came to a hatch. Caitlyn nodded to Vi and the enforcer opened the door in a classic breach style. Caitlyn went in; gun raised, and found herself in a large room, filled with strange yet familiar objects.

Heimerdinger pushed past both of them. "Just as I thought! We were in a maintenance corridor, and this is the vehicle bay!" He turned to his scientists and began ordering them around, telling them what to study.

Caitlyn wondered how the inventor had figured that out. She had been assuming the thing was a large metal box.

"Shit, Cait, take a look at this," said Vi. She had a gauntlet resting on the hood of a boxy looking vehicle.

"It looks like a Motorcar, but lacks all of the elegance," Caitlyn said with distaste.

"Yeah, but check this out! This thing on the back looks like an oversized minigun!" Vi said excitedly. Vi mimicked pulling the trigger and made explosion noises. Caitlyn just rolled her eyes.

"It is my belief that these are not made for recreational uses, but for combat," said Heimerdinger from behind Caitlyn.

Caitlyn looked down at the Yordle. "Why would anyone need something like this? Do you think its Noxian?"

Heimerdinger shook his head. "If this was Noxian, it would have some sort of hextech. This is something else entirely." He brought out his scanner again. "I have discovered something

interesting. I've detected a signal originating from deeper in the ship. It isn't hextech, so I can't tell what it is. It does appear to be rather weak, though, so it's unlikely it is an alarm."

Caitlyn thought about it for a moment. While she wasn't going to rule out the possibility that it was an alarm, it did not seem likely. The other possibility was that it was a request for help, and that would mean someone was alive.

"Alright, we are going to go check this signal out," Caitlyn said, nodding to both Vi and Heimerdinger.

Vi just made a sighing noise while Heimerdinger shook with excitement. Caitlyn had her officers set up a perimeter around the scientists, and then Caitlyn, Heimerdinger and a couple of scientists set off immediately.

Contrary to what Heimerdinger had said, they didn't have to travel far to find the origin of the signal. They found themselves in a room lined with pods on either side of the walls. There appeared to be only frost inside of them. There was debris scattered all across the floor, and there were burn marks on the walls. It looked as if the room had gone through a fire.

"Vi, don't touch anything," Caitlyn said as Vi leaned on a particularly frozen pod.

"That's odd," Heimerdinger said. "I can't find anything that would give off a signal. There should have been â€" "

He was cut short by a hissing noise. Cold, white vapour flooded the room.

"I swear I didn't touch nothin'!" Vi shouted, backing away from the pod she had been leaning on just moments before.

The hissing and vapour stopped just as soon as it started, though.

"Ah, seems to be some sort of defrosting procedure. I do the same with some of my biological samples at the laboratory," the professor explained.

The pod began to open, and they all peered inside.

Out of everything Vi and Caitlyn had been prepared to see, they did not expect a giant in green armour to step out of the pod. He was at least a head taller than Vi, and his armour was like nothing the Sheriff had ever seen. It was bulkier and more advanced than any hextech armour in Piltover. Or Valoran, for that matter.

The trio stared at it, unsure of what to do.

It was the giant that broke the silence, speaking in a baritone voice.

"I'm Spartan 117 Master Chief Petty Officer of the UNSC _Forward Unto Dawn_. Are you a UNSC recovery team?"

Vi decided to respond by throwing a punch at the Spartans chest.

* * *

><p>So, uh... tell me what you think? Or don't, totally up to you.

2. Chapter 2

**'Sup (not the lane). Decided to upload a second chapter and see how that goes, because apparently this fic isn't a bust (yet). Ah, first thing, if the Chief ever comes across as overly OOC, please let me know. I'm finding it a little bit hard writing the dialogue for the Chief when he's talking to civilians because the novels give me no framework to work off of. Also, the first chapter was, again, just a prologue chapter, so I skipped out on a lot of the Master Chief's... abilities, if you know what I mean. That stuffs in this chapter.
**

So... forwards?

* * *

><p>Chapter 2 - The Horse You Rode In On<p>

Caitlyn didn't understand what just happened. She saw Vi throw the punch, and was sure that would be the end of the armoured being â€" the Spartan - but instead Vi was thrown across the room. It all happened in the time it took Caitlyn to blink.

She saw the Spartan turn, scanning the room, and then turning back to her. It was then that she noticed the familiar weight of her rifle in her hands.

Should she shoot? She was nothing if not practical, and never surrendered, but she wasn't entirely sure if the bullet would even do

anything to the Spartan. It had taken out Vi, after all. And even if it did, she would only have time for one shoot, since they were so close.

Caitlyn saw the Spartan tense, and she made a decision.

She lowered her gun to the floor, and raised her palms to itâ€|him?

She only hoped it wouldn't rip her head off.

* * *

><p>The Master Chief didn't know what to do.<p>

He had woken up after his cryotube went through emergency de-frosting procedures. He had heard voices, possibly female, outside of the tube, but none of them sounded like Cortana. He had emerged from the cryotube slowly, aware of his reduced muscle mass. Nearly 40%. Must have been out for a while.

The other occupants of the room were not what he expected at all.

One was small, maybe a dwarf human of some sort, with wild hair.

The other two were both female, one wearing a purple outfit with a top hat, and the other had pink hair and work patchwork armour.

He was unsure of what to say, so he just opted with the standered procedure of name, rank, and number. "I'm Spartan 117 Master Chief of the UNSC Forward Unto Dawn. Are you a UNSC recovery team?"

The response was also something the Chief did not expect.

A punch to the face.

Chief had easily sidestepped the blow, hastily aimed as it was. He had then used his palm to push his assailant across the room, but he had miscalculated his reduced strength, and the blow had launched her to the other end instead of killing her outright.

The Chief had then scanned the room, taking note of exits. He also noticed that his radar had picked up two yellow, neutral signals outside the door, but he knew that that could mean anything from civilians to enemies without an IFF, so he decided to categorize them as hostiles.

He had turned his attention back to the woman in purple. Obviously an accomplice of insurrectionist that had just punched him. She held an odd, old-fashion rifle and radiated an aura of authority. Knowing he wouldn't have the time to reach for his weapons, he had tensed himself for a fight, and then the weirdest thing happened. She had put the gun down.

"I'm Caitlyn, Sheriff of Piltover, and we mean you no harm," the woman, now identified as Caitlyn, had said.

That's when Chief became confused.

Insurrectionists had never surrendered before, let alone said they meant him "a Spartan" no harm. He was their number one enemy - aside from the government, of course. Chief grimaced under his helmet. He liked it when everything was clear cut. Being political wasn't his strong suit.

he _could_ _kill_ them all, he reasoned this was like a monitor situation. Use them for what he needed, kill them if they became a problem._
>

He decided to treat these people as potential friendlies instead of hostiles "for the moment, anyways.

He glanced to his left, and noted that the pink haired woman was just getting up.

The Sheriff followed his gaze and misunderstood it. "I apologize for my partner's behavior, she gets" excited when she meets new people."

The Chief looked back at her. He wanted to get this over with as quickly as possible. "Is there a UNSC base on planet? I need to contact my superiors immediately."

The Sheriff furrowed her brows at the Chief's sudden change in demeanor. "I'm not sure what " UNSC is," she said. "And what do you mean by planet?"

Chief was actually surprised at that, and it took a lot to surprise him. No idea what the UNSC was? No concept of planets? Where was he, exactly?

really, the only possibility was an insurrectionist base, but that didn't fit with their over all demeanor.

He prepared to ask her, but as soon as the words left his mouth, he felt the floor beneath his feet shift.

The other three people in the room stumbled forwards a bit, but the Chief remained upright, a testament to his Spartan abilities. And his magnetically locked boots.

"What the fuck was that?" The pink-haired woman asked.

The Sheriff looked at the small man.

The small man shrugged. "The structure is probably beginning to slide down. I did say time was of the essence."

"Did he?" the pink haired woman muttered under her breath.

"All right then," the Sherriff began, turning to pink-hair. "Vi, radio the officers and tell them to evacuate immediately."

"But what about all the technology on board!" The small man shouted.

"Our lives are more important than technology," She replied. She turned to the Chief. "I'm sure you have questions for us, and we

definitely have questions for you, but this block is currently sliding down a cliff and will soon be at the bottom of the bay. It would be best if you came with us, and we can continue this conversation later."

The Chief nodded. He had to admit, she made sense. He turned around and grabbed his Assault Rifle and Magnum from where he had stashed them before going into Cryo. He also grabbed as much ammo as he could carry.

He checked the ammo counter on his AR " full. He moved his free hand to the back of his helmet, making sure Cortana's chip was secure

He didn't have her chip.

He called out her name, and got no response.

He looked around the room, ignoring the looks the others gave him. His gaze alighted on a large, cylindrical object on the floor.

The projector he had plugged Cortana into.

He moved towards it, turning it over. The entire front half of the projector was dented in. He tried to remove the chip, with no success. He ran his finger down the seam in the front, going about two thirds of the way down. He punched the metal lightly, making a small gap in the seam. While the gap was too small for his fingers, it was just big enough for his combat knife. He jammed it in and turned, opening up the projector.

His heart fell.

The insides were burned. The inner plating was scorched and warped. The entire thing must have gone through an electrical fire.

He carefully extracted Cortana's memory chip. It was bent at a thirty degree angle and lacked the blue glow that usually danced along its surface.

The Chief realized he had a choice to make. He could leave the ship with the other three, or take his chances and stay, and try to comb through the ships' systems before it sank.

He looked at the deactivated computer screen mounted on the wall.

"Let's go"

* * *

><p>They had all made it back to the Sheriff's office without incident. No one had said a word. They all just stared at the Chief as he, in turn, stared at the Dawn, which slowly sank beneath the waves.

"What should we call you?" asked the Sheriff. She had told the Chief to call her Caitlyn, though he didn't really like the informality.

"Chief," was his curt response. He stood four paces in front of the desk, as he had been taught to do while addressing superior officers. Not that the Sheriff " Caitlyn " was superior.

"Why don't you take a seat," the Sheriff offered.

The Chief looked at the chair for a moment. "It won't hold my weight."

She blinked, surprised. "...How much do you weigh?"

He considered not answering, but his weight wasn't deemed forbidden knowledge by ONI. "1000 pounds."

"Holy shit, Tin man, are you even alive under there?" Vi asked. "Or are you, like, one of Jayce's shitty automatons?"

Caitlyn gave Vi a sharp glance.

"I'm human," said Chief. He was finding this experience disturbing. Nothing he had seen so far indicated that this city " or its people - had contact with the galactic community. It was all rather| steampunk.

"Yes, yes," said Heimerdinger. "Some sort of enhanced human, yes?"

Chief looked squarely at the little one and gave a small nod. Clearly, this one was much smarter than he had initially believed. He would need to watch it more closely.

"I must also ask, what does your suit run on? There is no hextech of any kind on it."

"That's classified," Chief responded, and then paused. Heimerdinger had mentioned something called hextech. Chief didn't like the sound of it. It gave him the same feeling the Halo rings did. "Hextech| what is that?"

Vi laughed. "Are you serious, Tin Man? You would have to be living under a rock to not know what Hextech is!"

Heimerdinger smiled, as if he was privy to an inside joke. "Hextech is the combination of technology and magic."

"No such thing as magic," said the Master Chief. At this point, he was ready to leave the room. But he needed more information, unreal as it may sound.

Vi and Caitlyn looked at the Chief through narrowed eyes. Heimerdinger smiled wider.

"Then my theory is correct," he said. "Magic is everywhere in this world. It is quite common. The only way you wouldn't know about it is if you were living under a really big rock " although Skarner may take offense to that " or you're not from this world."

Chief looked at Heimerdinger. Well, that confirmed his suspicion that they had no contact with the galactic community. He gave a small nod.

"I'm also assuming, then, that the thing that brought you here is some sort of war vessel?"

Chief nodded again. "A UNSC Charon class light frigate."

"Soâ€¦ what? A flying ship?" Vi asked, a smirk on her face.

"A space ship," Caitlyn responded. She seemed to understand what was going on.

Vi looked astounded.

"Am I also correct to assume that the UNSC would be your government?" Heimerdinger asked. Clearly he wanted as much information as possible. Just like Cortana, Chief thought.

Heimerdinger didn't wait for an answer, though. He kept asking questions. "And a Spartan is a soldier of some kind, yes?"

The Master Chief hesitated, not sure how much he should say. "A Super Soldier," He decided to say. It was the easiest thing to say, and it seemed to satisfy Heimerdinger.

The other two occupants of the room went dead silent.

"Would you... mind stepping out for a bit?" asked Caitlyn. She looked disturbed.

Chief nodded, and stepped outside. It didn't really matter, though. He was more than capable of hearing them through the door.

"We can't keep him here." That was Caitlyn's voice.

"But the scientific possibilities-" Heimerdinger responded.

"No. If Noxus or Demacia found out we were keeping an space-faring super soldier in the city, they would be furious. And would think we're gearing up for war."

"So what? Let them come. We'll crush 'em," Vi said.

"Bad, bad idea. Bandle City would also be suspected and attacked. Also, if Noxus, or divines forbid, Zaun, got their hands on the Master Chiefâ€¦." Heimerding trailed off, as if the implications were clear.

For the other two, they were. Silence descended.

"We could hide it," said Vi.

He heard a snort, presumably from Caitlyn. "There are spies everywhere. Do you really think there's anywhere we can hide him?"

"So what? Do we kill him?" Vi asked. She sounded eager. Chief had to give her credit â€" she was tough. And foolhardy.

"The Institute of War would be most interested in him. The Institute is neutral ground, so he would be safe there. And I'm sure the

summoners would enjoy having a super-soldier around," Caitlyn said. "It would be like Kayle and Morgana. They don't belong to any city-state, and they live year-round in the Institute itself."

"Having him join the league would be the best option, I guess. Although science would certainly suffer for it," Heimerdinger said ruefully, before adding, "and we should not forget that the Summoners are his only hope to get back home, since we have no space flight capable craft."

"The summoners could do that portal shit, yeah," said Vi, sounding sad that she couldn't pummel anyone.

"Okay then. It would be best if we handled this immediately, so I don't have to report it to the Governor. He would be less than anxious to part with a super â€" solider," Caitlyn said.

There was the sound of footsteps â€" armoured boots, Chief noted â€" as someone made their way to the door.

The Chief opened it first, revealing a somewhat surprised looking Vi.

"Slow down there, Tinny," she said.

Caitlyn opened her mouth, ready to explain, but The Chief stopped her.

"I heard everything, and I agree. I need to report in immediately."

Caitlyn closed her mouth. "These walls are sound-proof," she said.

The Chief shrugged, which was no mean feat for someone wearing powered assault armour.

Caitlyn rubbed her eyes. "Vi, would you be so kind as to show the Master Chief to the barracks? It would be best for him to wait things out there."

"Come along, Tinny." Vi walked through the door without even looking at the Chief. He followed without a word.

Caitlyn gave out a great sigh, and Heimerdinger gave her a knowing glance. She reached over and grabbed the phone lying on her desk.

It glowed a faint pink light as she grabbed it. She whispered a name into the pad near the center, and it glowed brighter.

Heimerdinger left the room, most likely to go study whatever his scientists were able to bring back.

"Hello, High Councillor Kolminye? I have the most interesting proposition for youâ€|"

* * *

><p>Don't kill me plox.

****So... The Chief isn't with Cortana. Originally I had written this and planned the story with the two together, but then it was brought to y attention that the Chief cant be OP compared to League champs, and that duo is the definition of OP. They kick ass and take names, and by kick ass I mean destroy superweapons capable of galactic genocide, rek covenant fleets and obliterate ground armies. And not to mention the fact that there would be no character development or interactions with other people at all if they were together. I felt this would make it easier for me to write.****

****Ehhhh... so, as always, review if there's something i can improve on. Or rather, for the second time.****

3. Chapter 3

****'ello. ****

****Someone said they wanted more, so here we go.****

****J****ust wanted to say thank you to all the people that have reviewed, its really helps me improve. I'm still not so good at this. Other than that, this story finally has some action it it, in the from of Chief's reflection.****

****Forwards!****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 3 â€" Forward Untoâ€| the Institute of War?<p>

Chief eyed the carriage dubiously.

"It'll hold your weight, I promise," said Heimerdinger. "It's been magically enchanted. It can hold someone three times your weight."

Chief continued to look at the carriage. At first he had been opposed to any notion that magic existed â€" then Vi had shown him a league match on the barracks television. He quickly changed his opinion after seeing a purple angel fighting against a werewolf.

That didn't mean he had to trust the stuff, though.

He tested the carriage with his foot. It held.

The carriage itself was very odd in design. While the main cabin and design was similar to that of carriages he had seen in pictures from museums before, that was were the similarities ended. This carriage had no wheels, instead having odd pipes that glowed vivid colours - fuel or magick? - that connected to a generator on the back. A crystal the size of his fist was set into it, slowly pulsing rings of energy that caused static to run down his shields.

After sighing internally, the Chief got in, followed by Vi and Caitlyn. Heimerdinger said he was going to stay behind to study the now submerged _Forward Unto_ _Dawn. _

Chief had been hesitant at first to allow the scientist to study the

_Dawn, _but he needed their co-operation if he was going to get off planet. Also, the _Dawns _computers were waterlogged, so it was unlikely he could find anything that would compromise the UNSC.

Caitlyn nodded to the driver, and they set off.

Both Caitlyn and Vi tried to ask the Master Chief questions, start a conversation, but he either gave monosyllabic answers, or didn't answer at all.

They assumed that he was trying to ignore them, since all he did was stare out the window and clutch a tiny chip in his hands.

He wasn't, though. Chief was actually trying to compile everything he learned and saw into a database â€" it would give him a tactical advantage, since he wasn't on familiar ground. He also lacked connection to the central ONI database that he usually relied on.

The Chief looked down at the chip in his hand and sighed inaudibly. If Cortana were here, this would be much easier for him. It was his duty to protect her, and he'd failed.

He missed her.

The Chief looked out the window and remembered CPO Mendez telling the Spartans not to become too attached to equipment. Chief had never really thought of Cortana in that way. He wondered if she had thought of him as equipment.

"Hey, Tin Man. Why do you keep holding that piece of metal?" asked Vi, laughing. "You're holding on to it like it's a pet or something."

Caitlyn turned to reprimand Vi, not excepting their other passenger to speak.

"She was my partner," he said. He looked from Vi to Caitlyn, then back. "Sheâ€¦ died."

Vi didn't stop smirking, but her gaze lacked any humor. Caitlyn gazed at Vi for a moment before looking down at her feet.

Chief stowed the chip in one of his armour compartments, then returned to staring out the window. The rest of the trip was in silence.

Eventually, they reached the large city that surrounded the Institute, though Chief did not consider it much of a city. By UNSC standards, this was a small town. In the distance, Chief could see white towers.

The Institute, he thought.

The roads were surprisingly uncrowded. Then again, it was nearing evening and people were most likely indoors.

The few people that were out, however, waved at the carriage and tried to take a peek through the windows, knowing that there were

League Champions inside. Caitlyn had made sure the windows were tinted, though. She wanted to keep Chief's identity a secret for now.

Chief was not really sure if it even mattered. In a world with angels and werewolves, would a solitary Spartan even make a difference? Would anyone even care?

The carriage stopped.

Chief looked out the window at the large building before him. It was large, made of white stone blocks. The building, despite its warlike name, looked like it was built for luxury. To the Chief, it was the nicest building he had ever seen. Not that he had seen many civilian buildings; the only ones he had ever seen in detail were the ones what the Covenant had already destroyed.

"Chief," Caitlyn said, drawing his attention. "The Summoners agreed to meet you, but that doesn't mean you're a champion yet. Through the entrance there you will find the reflecting chamber. When you get in there, you will be tested."

Vi laughed.

"I apologize that I can't tell you more, but it's against the rules to do so. Just answer truthfully, and you should do fine."

Chief nodded, but he did not really care. It wouldn't be any worse than basic training.

He got out and walked down the path. He didn't look back.

Once inside, he was able to marvel at the true beauty of the place. It wasn't the exquisitely carved walls, or the gold filigree that traced a path along the floor that grabbed his attention, it was the layout. The corridor looked harmless enough, made for luxury, but his trained eye saw better. He could see chokepoints and lookout areas, gaps in the wall and perfect places for ambushes. This wasn't some hotel for the famous; it was a bunker.

The Chief found himself worrying about the Summoners. The last thing he needed was magically powerful dictators telling him what to do.

Eventually, Chief found himself in front of two large marble doors, each one inlaid with precious stones. Above the door an inscription read _the truest opponent lies within. _He allowed himself to smile briefly. If Cortana were here, she would have driven him crazy telling him all the possible meanings.

But she wasn't here, so the Chief had to rely on instinct and training.

He drew his assault rifle and opened the door with his left shoulder, aiming his rifle into the room.

Empty.

He stepped inside. It was pitch black.

He tried turning on his helmets lamp, but it could not pierce the blackness that pressed in from all sides.

He cycled through his helmets' different visor modes, to no success.

He heard the door close behind him.

He blinked, and opened his eyes to a blue sky and a bright sun. He realized he was on his back, helmet off. Above him two UNSC Shortswords raced forwards, chasing banshees.

He could hear the scream of plasma nearby.

He tried to use his right hand to block out the sun, and then looked around for his helmet.

There.

He reached out for it and put it on his head. Immediately he was assaulted by the sound of com chatter.

He couldn't make heads or tails of it â€" too much static.

"Chief?" he thought he heard someone ask. It sounded like Johnson, but he wasn't too sure. Too much white noise.

Chief's eyes alighted on his assault rifle as someone called the general order to regroup.

Chief stood up and placed the assault rifle on his back. In the distance he could see the dome of energy created by the ark portal. UNSC ships were clashing with Covenant destroyers above it.

Another wave of plasma mortars launched from within the dome.

"Got any sign of the Chief?" definitely Johnson.

"Negative," a marine replied. "I think we lost him."

Chief blinked on the icon in the corner of his HUD and opened his comm. "Not yet," he said.

He grabbed a bubble shield generator from his side and deployed it. At that very moment, plasma mortars descended. They impacted around him, instantly vaporizing his mongoose and turning the sand into glass. One mortar hit the shield, but nothing happened.

As soon as the last mortar landed, Chief began to sprint. He locked his magnum to his hip and drew his assault rifle.

He sidestepped a Banshee bomb and ran right up to the edge of the cliff.

Below was a group of Brutes, a chieftain, and four Wraiths.

Chief didn't have time to think; he jumped.

He landed right on top of one brute, killing it instantly. He fired a burst at the one beside him, the bullets breaking its skull.

He ducked under the blow of another brute, and slide around it. He gripped its head and pulled. There was a snap.

He held up its body and blocked a volley of spikes that had been aimed at his head.

He returned fire, cutting down two more of the brutes.

The Master Chief looked to his left, and frowned. The leftmost wraith had a clear shot now.

He rolled to the right, towards the brutes, successfully avoiding turrets fire. He placed his now empty rifle on his back and drew a plasma grenade "his last, he noted- and threw it.

It detonated, and, by luck, started a chain reaction in the vehicles plasma core. The Wraith careened wildly to the side, smashed into the other Wraith, and detonated, vaporizing the left flank instantly.

The Chieftain, undisturbed by the raining debris, ran at the Chief.

He ducked under its blow and sprang to the side.

He then realized he was in a bad position: Wraiths to his left, Chieftain to his back, and Brutes ahead.

Time slowed down into a familiar state called 'Spartan Time'. Spartan Time was a state where a Spartan perceived time at a fraction of its usual pace.

Chief began to think wildly. He could tackle the Chieftain " but if he killed it, the wraiths would be on him.

He could not charge the Wraiths as this would leave him open to crossfire.

He could only charge the Brutes.

Time began to speed up.

Chief could see the eagerness in the eyes of the brutes; one of them began to depress the trigger on his brute shot.

The Chief had an idea. He had done something once before, on his first test run with Cortana. It was risky, but he had always been lucky.

The brute fired his weapon.

Instead of springing aside, Chief readied himself. At the last second he slapped the projectile aside, into the sand. It exploded, draining his shields immediately.

More importantly, it threw up a cloud of sand.

Chief used the cloud to run at the Wraiths. He dived on the first on, pummelled the driver, shot the passenger, then did the same to the

second. With the tanks out of commission, Chief felt more confident.

"DEMON!" roared the Brute Chieftain as it began to run towards the Master Chief.

Chief considered his options. His AR was out of ammo, his magnum was unlikely to put down the Brute before it hit him, and his combat knife was relatively useless against a gravity hammer.

He decided to do things the old fashioned way " he charged it.

The Brute swung the hammer around in an arc, heaved it above his head, and slammed it down towards the Chief.

The Chief rolled to the left, then jumped onto the hammer and ran up the haft, onto the Chieftains chest, and then kicked, hitting the Chieftain in the head and back flipping off.

Chief landed on all fours as the Brute reeled back from the blow. The Chieftains hands left the hammer, and that was all the opening the Spartan needed.

He grabbed the hammer, spun it around, and slammed it against the Brute.

At this range, the hammer would instantly kill it. The gravity field emitted by the head would crush every bone in the Brutes chest.

Except the blow didn't land.

The Chieftain caught it, and smiled.

The Chief was confused. Had he miscalculated? Was the hammer out of charge?

No, that wasn't it.

The Chief tilted his head and understood.

"Illusion?" he asked, and got a nod in return. At once, the environment around him began to fade out like an old movie reel.

"Why do you want to join the league?" asked the Chieftain.

"I need to go back. You're the only ones capable of that."

The Chieftain nodded as if the answer satisfied him. "How does it feel, exposing you mind?"

Chief tilted his head and shrugged. "Last occupant was more snarky."

The Chieftain raised its eyebrows in surprise, maybe? If really had searched his mind, it would know all about Cortana. Maybe it was just the way he responded.

They looked at each other for a moment as the illusion continued to

decay around them.

"We can try and help you, but this will not be easy. We expect some sort of compensation, on your part."

The Chief suddenly found himself disliking summoners. Although, if he was honest with himself, he was already expecting this.

"We would like you to stay on as a league champion for a time. Political parties have already begun to doubt our ability to keep people safe. It would be most welcome to have an experienced soldier on our side," said the Chieftain. "It would certainly give us more incentive to help you if you help us."

The Chief understood the underlying message.

He nodded his agreement. He really didn't see another way. And really, these people would not be any worse than Colonel Ackerson.

"One thing, though," said Chief. "I want my stuff from aboard the _Dawn._"

"That can be arranged," said the Chieftain/Summoner as the vision faded completely.

The Master Chief stood in the dark room, alone. He put his AR on his back.

A column of light spilled from the doors opening across from him, cutting thorough the oppressive darkness.

He walked through, and didn't look back.

* * *

><p>So if anyone was wondering (not that I would except anyone to) the fighting scene was from Halo 3's E3 trailer, which you guys should watch, because its badass. The fight against the Chieftan was from Halo 4's opening cutsceneprologue things.**

4. Chapter 4

Hello again. I managed to rush out another chapter, and I think i'll be able to update twice a week if i work at this pace.

Anyways, for the sake of clarity, I wanted to say some things. If you don't care about clarity, please, skip this.

**So, this story takes place at the current state of the league lore, so all the champions are part of the institute and all major wars are over. Secondly, the Master Chief's age tends to be a rather obscure thing. In the 343 lore, he is roughly 45 at the events of Halo 4, and roughly 39 at the end Halo 3. I decided to knock off 4 years from his age because of slipspace travel, which would cause him not to age. According to the novel Contact Harvest, it took several months (I think 3) for a very very fast ONI prowler to make it from Harvest (one of the outermost colonies) to Reach, the military might of the

inner colonies. any UNSC military ship the Chief served on would be at least twice as slow, so it makes sense that 5 years of a 25 year war were spent travelling to and from battle zones.**

So Chief's biologically 35, a multiple of 7. Chronologically... well, that we don't know. yet.

**GO GO GO! **

* * *

><p>Chapter 4 - Sorry, were you in the middle of something?<p>

The Master Chief walked through the halls, mapping it all out in his database. He paused to look out a window at the city. It was later than he had expected, and the city was silent. Clearly he had been in the reflection chamber for a while.

"Sir?" said a small voice from behind him.

The Chief turned, startled that his motion sensor hadn't detected any movement. He'd have to check it later.

The voice had come from a boy, half the Chief's height, with sand blond hair and a round face.

"I'm Reighlen. I've been assigned as your, uh, assistant," he said with a small smile. "It's all part of my Summoner training, you see, and I'm really-"

"I don't need an assistant," Chief said with finality. He began to leave.

"Wait! The summoners said you would say that, and I'm s-"

"I don't want an assistant." The Chief stopped in the middle of an intersection.

"I can help! I was told you were new, and I can help you get acquainted here! Please? I really need to do this, if I don't I can't be a real s-"

"Can you get maps?" asked the Chief. It would be useful for him to have knowledge of the layout of the land. It was a serious tactical weakness not to.

The boy furrowed his brow. "Maps?"

"Maps of the institute, of the land, of the cities, anything."

The boy blinked, and then nodded vigorously. "Sure, sure, I can get all those."

The Chief began to walk again, then stopped. "My room?" he asked without looking over his shoulder.

"Uhâ€¦ Its wing C, room 19. I think. Probably. Yeah, that's it."

The Chief changed directions and kept walking.

"Oh yeah, the Summoners also told me to tell you that the cafeteria would still be serving food at this hour."

The Chief changed directions once again and kept walking.

"I can show you whe-"

"No," said the Chief, and he continued to follow the signs.

The mess hall wasn't as empty as the Chief would have liked. Apparently, Champions still ate food at this hour.

The Chief walked in and immediately began to commit the layout of the room to memory. Two entrances, several tables, seven large windows, a long counter for food.

This room wouldn't last a firefight, he thought.

He then started to examine the occupants of the room, making sure none were a threat.

All of the occupants were human, with the exception of a large armadillo.

At one of the tables in the corner were two people swathed in ninja-looking cloth. They didn't even glance his way.

The table in the middle housed a group of people having a loud debate. One of the people, a man with spiked black hair and a red cloak, looked at him with narrowed eyes.

The table closest to the entrance held four people, all talking calmly. They all turned to stare at him. The small blonde at the table nudged the young man sitting beside her, and he turned back to the regal looking man at the other end.

The Chief decided to categorize them all as hostiles. It was easier that way.

He began to walk towards the food counter, weaving his way through the haphazardly placed tables.

He grabbed a plate, and as he looked at the food, his stomach growled powerfully. He hadn't realized how hungry he was.

He reached out to grab some meat, and stopped. He really couldn't decide what he wanted; it all looked so good. The past year all he had eaten was Spartan rations and MRE's.

He decided to grab a bit of everything.

As soon as his plate was piled high and he grabbed something to drink, he left. He wanted to have as little contact as possible with the Champions of this place.

He found his room as quickly as possible; making sure his food didn't go cold. Not that he wouldn't eat it cold " it just seemed a shame not to eat it hot.

He opened the door, stepped inside, and stood in awe.

The room was more of an apartment than a room. The main area was a living room, complete with a couch, a desk, and a television set. The room adjoining it was an open concept kitchen. The two doors on the other side led to the washroom and bedroom respectively.

While the other Champions of the league may not have found this fancy, to the Chief, this was five star luxury. He had never been in a place like this " the most comfort he got was a couple hours sleep in a metal bed in a military barracks.

He would need to make some changes, though.

After he had eaten, the Chief began to fortify his new home. He re-arranged the living room furniture, having it all face away from the door, giving him the option to use it as cover should someone enter from that way. He did the same with his bed, making sure it was easily flippable. The windows were another matter. He wasn't sure if they could withstand a bullet, so he would need to find some way to reinforce them. In the meantime, he just settled on locking them.

What now?

The Chief eyed the shower. He decided that it couldn't hurt to try it out. It had been a while, after all. He wouldn't want Cortana to "

He sighed. Memories began to rush back to him, making it hard to concentrate.

He tried to distract himself with the warm water of the shower, but she wouldn't leave his mind. The Spartan finished quicker than he liked and padded in the next room, deciding to shave in the morning. It had been a long time since he'd done that.

He grabbed his dog tags. They were simple, but the only real thing he owned. His armour wasn't even his own property.

He unlocked the chain and slide Cortana's chip onto it. He had bent it back into shape, and all it lacked was its old blue glow. He locked the chain back around his neck.

The Chief grabbed his helmet and began the process of opening it up. He found the mirrors which composed the motion sensor system, and noted that they were iced over.

_That's what's preventing them from working, _he thought.

He got to work on cleaning them, using a cloth from the shower and warm water from the kitchen, then re-assembled his helmet.

What to do now?

He grabbed his AR and magnum and began the process of taking them apart, cleaning them, and then putting them back together. While he didn't have anything to oil them down with, he reckoned that that they would be just fine. The UNSC built their gear sturdy. He placed them on his desk, then glanced over at his armour. It was in some pretty bad shape, but that was something that couldn't be so easily

fixed. He would have to wait until he was back in UNSC controlled space.

He glanced at the time on the odd, hextech clock mounted on the wall. It was late, but he didn't even feel tired.

The Chief glanced around the room, then grabbed the clock and opened it up.

He could see gears and miniature steam valves inside, but nothing like he had ever seen. Most of the pieces didn't even connect. There were minuscule pipes that, just like the carriage, pumped some sort of glowing liquid - or magic - around. In the center of the mechanism was a small indentation that had a small crystal set into it. Every time it sparked, energy was sent coursing through the parts and was seemingly absorbed by them.

Chief placed it back on the wall. While he was curious, he didn't know a single thing about hextech and didn't want to cause the clock to explode.

After a few more minutes of looking up at the ceiling, doing nothing, the Chief decided to go back out. He remembered some signs pointing to a training room. He could go there, see what kind of stuff they have to work out with.

He began the long process of putting his armour back on, then stepped outside.

The Institute was quiet. He walked down the halls, silent as death despite the bulk of his armour.

He followed the signs all the way to the training room. The lights appeared to be on.

Maybe that's how it's supposed to be, he thought. He knew UNSC training rooms always kept the lights on to encourage training. It was important to stay in peak physical condition.

He walked in, and found that he was wrong. In the center of the massive space was a woman, some years younger than the Chief. She had white hair and seemed to be going through some motions with a short sword.

The motions were precise, controlled, and it was quite beautiful. For the Chief, it was also maddeningly familiar. The underlying technique of the motions was similar to the motions he and his Spartans went through when training with large weapons; the same technique he used every time he picked up a gravity hammer.

But why do it with a short sword?

Upon closer inspection, the Chief realized the sword was actually broken. It was made of black stone inlaid with green runes, and it appeared to be quite broad.

That made more sense. She was practicing the technique she used to use back when her sword was whole.

Chief stared for a few more moments, then decided to go back to his

room. He was not interest in training with someone else present.

The woman froze and turned slowly, as if sensing his presence, which was a feat in and of itself. As soon as she saw the Chief, her eyes widened.

The Chief realized he must have scared her. He did make a rather imposing sight in his battle-scarred armour. He hadn't been called The Demon for nothing.

"Sorry," he said. "I was unaware anyone was here."

She jerked her head back, as if not expecting him to speak. Or maybe she hadn't expected it to be so deep. "I was just leaving," she said in a soft voice.

Her voice was very soft, and while the Chief had no trouble hearing her, he imagined others did.

"Why use a damaged weapon?"

The Chief took a few seconds to realize he had spoken. Why did he say that? He didn't actually care. He would be gone soon, so the information was irrelevant.

The Chief chalked it up to him being rattled about the day's events. Everything was far from normal.

The woman frowned and looked down at her blade, held in two hands.

"A sword mirrors its owner," she said finally.

The Chief looked down at his own armour, all chipped and dented. Oddly enough, the Chief understood what she meant.

The woman put her blade away in a complex leather sheath and walked towards the door. She stopped beside the Chief, and held out her hand.

The Chief was surprised. He didn't imagine that people on a remote world would have the same traditions as the UNSC. A disturbing thought began to nag at the back of the Chief's mind.

The Chief shoved the thought away and took the hand, trying to be as gentle as possible.

The woman left, leaving the Chief in the empty room.

The Chief looked around. There was certainly a lot of stuff to train with.

Staring hard at the targets on the wall, the Master Chief grabbed a crossbow, and took aim.

He fired.

* * *

><p>Right. So... I've been thinking, and I decided, contrary

to my original plans for the story, to add a relationship. I have been trying to narrow down the possibilities - it has to be someone who is similar to the Chief and someone he can relate to - and managed to narrow it down to about 7 champs. But, if anyone has thoughts, i'm open to suggestions.

So review if you think there's anything I can improve on, and... see you next time? Or maybe not. I'd understand why, seeing as how i'm pretty bad at this.

5. Chapter 5

Hello again. Here's another chapter because, apparently, people actually _like _this story. Not that I would know why.

Anyways, I just wanted to say that I might put more a bit more emotion into the Master Chief than is seen in the games. The novels have him a tiny bit more emotional regarding certain things. Don't expect it to much, though.

**Aaaaand I've decided on a 'romance' for the Chief, or w/e you wanna call it. Expect it to be slow and (hopefully) vague. **

Wort Wort Wort!

* * *

><p>Chapter 5 - Off the rock, through the bush, nothing butâ€| league<p>

The Master Chief did not sleep at all.

He had stayed awake through the whole night, training, trying to keep his mind off of Cortana. Now he sat in his room, re-assembling his MA5C for the seventh time.

There was a knock at the door.

The Chief hesitated, then walked to the door. Hand on his magnum, he opened it, revealing the smiling face of Reighlen.

"Good morning, sir. High Councillor Kolminye wanted to see you in her quarters," he said quickly.

The Chief nodded and walked back to the table, placing his assault rifle on his back. He wasn't about to go meet a Summoner without his weapons.

"Oh, and also, I'm, uh, supposed to, uh, put a name plaque on your door, butâ€| I don't know what to put on it." The boy sounded a bit nervous.

The Chief didn't really want a plaque on the door announcing his presence to the world. It was a tactically bad move, but he also understood that he had to follow the rules of this league if he wanted to get home.

"MCPO, space, S-117," Chief said. It was what was inscribed on his dog tags.

The boy blinked. "That's an odd name," he said. The Chief glared at him, and though the boy couldn't see his eyes, it was unnerving. "But good! I really like the, uh, numbers. In there," he added quickly, shifting his gaze.

The Chief brushed past the boy, locked his door, then walked away. He made it halfway down the hall before realizing he didn't know where the High Councillor's quarters were.

He looked back at the boy.

"Follow me," the boy said with a smile.

* * *

><p>"This is it," said the boy.<p>

The Chief stood outside a large, mahogany wood door. It was inlaid with silver and gold, with a large white gem in the middle. He was almost afraid to knock for fear of breaking it.

Just as he raised his hand to the door, it opened, revealing a woman with sharp features.

"Ma'am," Chief said. He was a little unsure of how to address her.

She smiled and ushered him inside. She took a seat behind her desk, then gestured to the seat across from it.

The Chief remained standing.

"I can honestly say I am glad you are here," she began, immediately talking business. "The League's been needing a strong new champion for a while, and you fit perfectly. I'm sure that if we wo-

"I'm not here to help you solve your political struggles," said the Chief. He fell silent after, annoyed at his outburst. He never had trouble before keeping his opinions to himself, and he couldn't quite convince himself it was just because he was rattled.

The High Councillor raised a trimmed eyebrow. "Yes, I am aware," she said. "And we aren't asking you to. We just want you to show off your skills on the rift. That's more than enough"

The Chief said nothing. He found himself greatly disliking the High Councillor.

She sighed and waved her hand, "anyways, I have other news. My Summoners have been trying to locate your home, but we have been unable to. It's as if your world never existed."

The Chief recalled his thought from last night. He had thought about it for a while, and found it could be a possibility. This made it all the more likely. "Maybe you're looking in the wrong place," he said. "I ended up here because the Ark Slipspace portal closed prematurely. Maybe it didn't just drop me out in an uncharted are of space. Maybe it moved me to an entirely different dimension."

The Councillor raised both her eyebrows this time. "That's a bit oddâ€¦ but certainly plausible. I'll have my Summoners widen their search. Not the first time we've had inter-dimensional guests."

That sounded like good news to the Chief. The sooner they found the UNSC, the sooner he could go back to where he was needed.

The Councillor smiled. "Also, Heimerdinger has sent us a shipment of your weapons, scavenged from the wreckage. It's being sent to your room."

The Chief nodded, grateful that he now had more equipment. He began to leave.

"I expect you to put it to good use on the Summoners Rift today."

The Chief froze. He turned sharply.

The Councillors smile widened. "Today is a practice game. You are going to participate."

* * *

><p>The Chief walked up to the summoning platform. While he really did not want to be in a war game simulation, he did not have much of a choice. Plus, he'd gone through worse simulations before. He brought with him a battle rifle, magnum, and plasma grenades, all taken from his new cache of weapons.<p>

There were already four champions at the top: A gold armoured angel, a large dog man, a cowboy, and a woman in sun-lit armour. They all turned to stare at him. The Chief walked past them and took his spot.

Immediately blue rings appeared around his body, and he heard a voice his head.

_Hello, _the voice said. _I'm your summoner for this match. Names Daniel._

While the Chief did not mind the voice â€" in fact, he found it almost reassuring â€" He was unsure of how to respond. If it was anything like Cortana, he would need to speak â€"

Not to worry. I can hear your thoughts

The Chief blinked.

The blue light around his body intensified, and everything around him disappeared, with the exception of the other champions.

A few seconds later, the Chief found himself on a platform in the middle of a base â€" the Summoners Rift.

"Explain this to me," said the Chief.

_Okay. Well, I'm here to guide you through this match. I'll monitor everything and give you useful information and tips. Your goal is to destroy the enemy nexus, but each path there is guarded by

turrets._

"Okay," said the Chief. It made enough sense. It was like capture the flag.

The other Champions began to leave the base for their respective lanes.

Okay, to your left is the store. You have some starting gold to spend on a rune. You gain gold by killing enemies. Go buy one now.

Chief did as he was told. He browsed over the selection, and chose a rune that was engraved with a purple blade.

Good. Now, put the rune in the case on your left hip.

Chief looked down and realized he did indeed have a case on his left hip. As soon as he placed the rune inside he felt a little bit stronger.

The case you have activates the power of the runes. You can only hold six. You can also buy potions to help you recover faster. Now go to the bot lane. Your support is waiting for you there.

"Support?"

_Oh yeah, forgot to mention that. You're the teams AD carry. You generally stay at the back of fights because you're easier to kill than most, and do a bunch of damage. _

The Chief found it amusing that he was assumed to be easy to kill.

_Now, don't be afraid to use your weapons. While on the rift, you have unlimited ammunition - we just keep summoning the same one over and over. You don't have to worry about conserving ammunition or scavenging for new weapons.__

That was the ability that the Chief liked the most. The ability to give his enemies no quarter and not worry about wasting his bullets? Genius.

* * *

><p>The Chief found it fairly easy to get into the rhythm of the game: get headshots on minions, harass opponents, and stay with the support. Not too much trouble. The match went fairly smoothly, up until his first engagement.<p>

Just as he went in to headshot a minion on a cannon, the enemy support threw a hook out to catch him.

Avoid it

The Chief dodged right, but the hook hit his own support, snagging on her armour. The enemy flew right up to the two of them and began to attack, swinging his hook around in deadly arcs.

Focus the enemy ADC

The Chief grimaced. He knew how to fight.

He fired his BR, feeling the gun rock in his hands. Each burst impacted on the corrupted archer, knocking him back a bit and damaging him.

The enemy support was causing some major damage on his own support, but she was managing to keep him at bay.

You should help your support out a bit

The Chief ignored him, the sound of his bullets overpowering his voice.

Movement. The Chief turned his head to the right and saw a metal face mask right beside him. He felt metal blades slash out at him, draining his shields partially.

The Chief ducked under the next swing, wondering why his motion sensor hadn't detected the enemy mid lane earlier. He'd have to check it again.

Another two blows hit the chief, draining his shields. As the enemy went in for another strike, the chief knocked him back with his foot, primed a plasma grenade, and tossed it at him.

The plasma grenade stuck and began to glow bright blue. It ignited the enemies red cloak and exploded. The Chief fired all the remaining bullets in his magazine at the target, hoping that would be enough.

"You could have warned me," the Chief said, annoyed.

Sorry, I wasn't paying attention to the other lanes. And anyways, the other summoner should have â€" DUCK

The Chief ducked and dodged a couple of shuriken's aimed at his head. He spun around, seeing his enemy behind him. He wasn't sure how he had gotten there so fast.

He drew his magnum with his off hand and fired twice, both shots hitting the enemy directly in the forehead. The enemy ran forwards, and the Chief tossed his BR to the ground and drew his combat knife from his left shoulder guard, and held it in a defensive position.

Your knife isn't going to work

The enemy slashed around in circle, and his combat knife barely blocked the blow. The Chief kicked the man away and looked at his knife. It was dented and unusable.

Told you

The Chief grimaced and threw it to the ground just as his enemy disappeared in a burst of shadow, then re-appeared in front of him. His blade swung towards the Chief.

Vertigo. He felt nauseous. The Chief found himself several feet away, under his own turret.

Sorry, should have warned you. I had no choice.

_There's always a choice, _thought Chief. Luckily for him was trained to fight even in these circumstances, so he fired his magnum, emptying every bullet at the cloaked figure and hitting him, killing him in a burst of light.

_Your support is going to die soon. We should try and â€" _

"No," said the Chief. "It's too late. Recuperate and regroup."

The only sound to break the silence was the Chief reloading.

Alright. Let me recall you back to base.

The Chief could only watch as his support was torn apart by a hail of arrows.

* * *

><p>"I can't believe we lost!" exclaimed the Cowboy. "It was that stupid mummy; kept camping my lane."<p>

"Yeah, well, it would have helped if you told us when your mid lane went missing," said the gold angel.

The Chief's teammates all walked side by side through the halls, heading towards the cafeteria. The Chief walked several steps behind them. The match had left him hungry, and that was the only reason he was near them.

They kept complaining, giving various reasons as to why they lost, but the Chief knew better. It had been his fault. It had been so long since he had worked as part of a team. He had been the weakest link. He couldn't even co-ordinate with his Summoner.

Not that it mattered. He had played the game, fulfilled his obligations.

He would be gone soon anyways.

They entered the cafeteria, the other four champions getting a table together. The Chief walked past them.

"Hey, big guy," said the sunny woman who had been his support. "Why don't you join us?"

The Chief had no intentions of socializing with these people. He saw no reason in it.

But he wasn't about to tell them that.

"Maintenance," he said, flexing his armoured hand.

They all stared at him, but he walked past, uncaring. It wasn't his duty to play nice with them

The Master Chief grabbed a plate, heaped it with food, and retreated back to his room.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

A man rose out of the water, walking onto the pier. It was dark out, almost pitch black, and the only reason the man was visible was because of the light coming off of his lantern.

He walked steadily forward, knowing no one was here to see him. At the end of the pier waited the scientist.

The scientist didn't even acknowledge the man's presence. He held out his hand.

The man dropped a small, hand-sized case into the scientist's outstretched palm.

"This is everything," said the man. "The rest was too damaged to extract correctly."

"It will suffice," the scientist replied. His voice was cold, cruel. "Your effectiveness has been noted, Marin."

The man nodded, knowing that he had just been dismissed. He turned to leave, anticipating the warm shower he would take. The water had been freezing cold.

Behind him, he could hear the scientist chuckle under his breath.

"Soon," he heard him mutter. "Soon."

* * *

><p>Okay. So, if there's anything i can improve on, please leave a review. If not, meh. Hope you guys have enjoyed the story so far.

6. Chapter 6

****Hey. So there are a set of reviews that I really, really enjoyed, because it made me realize my thought process is not very clear when it comes to some things. SO, here I'm going to attempt to clarify my thought process, just so I don't seem like someone who doesn't know my lore. I really do.****

****The first thing is that the Master Chief does NOT always get along with superior officers. Colonel Ackerson is someone that Chief (and all Spartans) disliked immensely, despite never meeting the guy. Also, there was a commander in the novel ****_**The Flood;**_**** I think it was Major Silva. May be wrong on his name, but the Master Chief vocally disagreed with him. While he was professionally while saying it, we can only imagine what went on in his mind. That is what I attempted to replicate here. The Chief also disagreed with the ONI officer in the novel ****_**First Strike, **_****and Captain Del Rio in**

Halo 4.**** The Master Chief is likening the High Councillor to those people. Just because he's obedient, does not mean he likes them.**

Also, yes, the Chief does care for people under his command, and yes, he is not a lone wolf anymore. However, in the novel **_the flood,**_** right after the Master Chief crash lands on Halo, he fights some elites and is ambushed by a veteran, almost getting himself killed. He even says that he left himself vulnerable because he was still trying to fight as a team. Even though he just went through the boarding action on the **_**autumn**_** by himself, he was still fighting like a team player. Ever since that point, The Chief has tried to fight as a lone wolf again. Now that he has lost Cortana, he is more reclusive. If it was that hard to break fighting as a team, imagine how hard it is now for him break that lone wolf fighting style. It almost got him killed the last time, this time it made him lose. Even in Halo 4, when he's with UNSC forces, he fights alone. Namely, the whole desert segment. **Imagine it as him being 'lost'.****

**The Chief believes that the Summoners can send him back through a portal as soon as they know where he lives. He doesn't think there is any danger in staying, and believes that bonds would slow him down. This will be re-iterated later in the story. **

**Aaaaaand the rank of Master Chief Petty Officer is not a very low one. Not high, but not low. He was put in charge by Mendez and Halsey, despite there being better options for command. The other kids did look up to him, but there were better. No Spartan achieved a higher rank than him while he was still in charge/with all together. They were all petty officers of some sort. Fred and Kurt were the first two lieutenants, I believe. The former was made so by Kurt, he promoted him after Kurt made it clear he would not be surviving Onyx. The latter became that rank after being separated from the Spartans. **

Imagine the Chiefs current stash of weapons being very limited. The Dingers will be going through the Ship, but it is slow going (cuz water) and the armoury is going to be hard to get in to. The majority of Chiefs weapon will be things that were just f**loating?/Lying? Around, so only the common stuff. It's not like the Chief would use most of the weapons he will receive. Aside from the light weaponry, he would save most of it. Also, the MA5 series is his weapon(s?) of choice.**

Lastly, the Chiefs abilities have NOT been restricted. He's been in one game. Jax got his abilities restricted after a bunch of 'em, and it's not like they knew he was a rape-train right after his judgment.

Sorry if this took too long. Needed to be said.

Blarg.

* * *

><p>Chapter 6 â€" Step Aside, Let the Man Go Through<p>

The Master Chief fiddled around with the miniscule mirrors inside his helmet, trying to align them just right. He didn't need his sensors

failing him when it matters most.

They were small little things, almost too small for his gauntleted hand to manoeuver. He had had plenty of training preforming field repairs, however, so it wasn't that much of a challenge. Regardless, they shouldn't need repairing in the first place. He'd inspected them again, but found nothing visibly wrong with them. They should have worked just fine. He couldn't even put it down to age, because he had not had the Mark 6 for all that long. Unless he had been floating in space for far longer than its operational capacity.

And that was a disturbing thought for more than one reason.

He snapped the last one back into place. There. Good as new.

He placed the helmet back on his head, hearing a _clunk _and feeling the bottom half lock on his jaw. He tilted his head around, making sure it was locked on properly. He then began to boot up the sensor software, going through all the start-up checks and making sure it was back in working order.

A yellow blip appeared.

There was a knock at the door.

"Chief? It's me, Reighlen. I've got those maps you asked for."

The Chief walked to the door. He briefly considered drawing his magnum, but decided to keep it on his hip instead. No point I scaring the kid. Besides, he would have heard anyone else there.

Outside the door stood the boy, holding several large scrolls. "These are all the maps I could find," he said. "Demacia, the Institute, Piltover, Zaun, Noxus. They're all up to date, except for the Noxus one."

The Chief nodded, grabbed them and placed the maps on his desk. He looked back and found the boy still standing there.

"Could I help you with anything else?" The kid asked timidly.

The Chief shook his head and began to open up the scrolls.

"You sure? I could do some errands for you, or something."

Chief shook his head again, moving to close the door.

"You know, I'm pretty good with hextech. I could help you fix your armour, it's pretty beat up."

There was no way the Chief was going to let someone he didn't trust touch his armour. He would make do with it in its current state until he was back with the UNSC.

"No," Chief said gruffly, and closed the door.

He then began the labour some process of inputting the maps into his database on Valoran.

While the Chief could not be sure if they were truly up-to-date, they

scroll material appeared to be fairly new, so he assumed they were.

The task took several hours to finish, and by the end of it, the Chief was thoroughly sick of staring at the same white walls. Even he could only take so much of the same thing.

It can't hurt to talk a walk, he thought.

But where should he go? Ideally, he would go and train, but he didn't want to do so while the room was occupied. And at this time of the day, it would be.

The Chief thought for a moment about going outside and seeing a bit of the city.

While he really didn't want to be in a public environment, it would help if he knew a bit of the surrounding area.

He sighed, and wished for the twelfth time that day that Cortana were here. He just couldn't seem to get his mind off of her. It would have been a lot better - and easier - if they were together as a team. She had been more than just equipment to him.

The Chief looked outside, and finally decided he would go for a walk outside. But off the main roads. It would be a good test to see the up-to-date-ness of the maps.

Rechecked his magnum, making sure it was secured. He decided to leave his rifles behind, trusting in his abilities and his magnum to deal with anything potentially dangerous.

He made his way out of his room and walked through the institute, using the least traversed pathways. His footsteps reverberated around the empty halls.

The Chief wondered at the material they used to line the floor. While it looked like polished white marble, it was holding his weight perfectly, not even disfiguring slightly. Even though he knew the metal flooring of the UNSC was just as strong, it wasn't nearly as nice looking. Not that the UNSC needed pretty flooring; its militaristic simplicity was more than fine for him. It was just interesting.

Eventually, the pathways led him to the massive space that was the main entrance hall. White pillars held the high, vaulted roof up, each one lined with spirals of gold.

There were quite a few people about: Champions, aids, Summoners. A few glanced his way, wide eyed, but most were too engrossed with their activities to notice him.

That was more than fine with the Chief.

He walked through the massive arched entryway and walked down the stairs that led to the courtyard. Beyond that was the main road.

The day was bright, the sky was clear, and the weather was good. All of these factors meant that plenty of people were outdoors, much to the dismay of the Chief.

He walked along the street, being carried along by the crowd. Many of the people turned to stare at him, obviously wondering who he was. He had only been in one match, after all. The normal folk wouldn't have seen him yet, or known he was a League Champion.

And the armour tends to be a bit intimidating.

The Chief noted that the people were all showing up on his motion sensor. That was good; it meant it was operational. Still, he would do a more thorough cleaning later on, just to be safe.

He turned down a side street that was not on his mini-map and began to look in store windows. Most of the stuff was jewelry and clothing, nothing of value, and certainly nothing that interested him. It wasn't all that important that the map hadn't shown this area.

A glint in the window.

The Chief turned around, seeing nothing.

He looked back. He was sure he had seen â€”

A flash.

The Chief rolled right, and the window he had been staring at not a moment ago exploded in a cloud of glass.

The Chief looked up at the roof of the opposing house, and saw someone stand up. The person dropped a long rifle and began to run.

The Chief ran after him, running on the street, keeping pace with the man. He knew that he could easily kill that man with a well-placed shot from his M6H, but he thought the Summoners would be much more interested in questioning the man.

The man turned and fired small balls of fire at the Chief, but each missed their mark, exploding against the stone. The Spartan, somewhat surprised at the use of magic, sped up as a response.

The man jumped across the main road, landing on a roof on the other side.

The Chief ran to catch him, but the crowd stopped him. Not wanting to make his way through the civilians, he quickly doubled back and scaled one of the smaller buildings. Once on the roof, it was an easy matter for the Chief to catch up to the man. The man glanced back and realized there was no way to outrun the Chief like this. He fired a couple of blasts to distract him, then he jumped down back to street level and ran head first into the crowd, forcing them apart.

The Chief decided to take a shortcut and jumped straight into the crowd, right ahead of the would-be assassin. He landed with a thud and a cloud of dust, perfectly aimed to avoid the traffic.

The Chief drew his magnum. The man quickly bolted, ducking behind more civilians, who were now starting to realize that something was going on.

The Chief didn't want to shoot in this crowd, and it would be hard to run through them. Back in the UNSC, people would have just moved out of the way if he told them to.

He was a Champion of the Institute, though. That could " _should_ - count for something.

"Everybody down!" he shouted. "I'm a League Champion!" he added, unsure if they would listen to him or not.

Miraculously, they did. As they descended in a wave, the Chief could see the man running, almost at the end of the street.

The Chief decided not to shoot the man and began to sprint, catching up to him in less than four seconds, despite the kneeling crowd. He knew he could have done better, but the acceleration would have proved difficult with the streets so clogged.

"There's nowhere to go," said the Chief.

The man looked thoroughly panicked. His eyes darted quickly to the side.

The second assassin smashed into the Chief.

The Chief was stunned. His motion sensor had failed him again. Medez had always told him not to rely on technology, and as a result, he had been ambushed.

The Chief shrugged off the blow, dropped his weapon and grabbed the second man's arm, twisting until he heard bones crack. He let go of him and turned back to the first man.

The first man drew a wickedly curved knife, etched with glowing runes, and slashed at the Chief.

The blade sparked against the Chief's shields, draining them down to half. The Chief danced back, out of the man's reach. The man lunged, and the Chief sidestepped, grabbed the man's arm, and bent back, snapping it.

He heard a click behind him.

He turned and saw the second man holding a green sphere in his good hand. There was some sort of " pin on the floor.

It was a grenade.

The man dropped it and ran. The magic inside began to react violently, going from a dull green colour to a bright, venomous purple. Waves of energy began to pulse from it.

The Chief snapped up his fallen magnum and fired it, hitting the man in the leg.

People around the man jerked back in surprise at the loud noise and the blood in the street, but none of them ran from the grenade. They probably didn't know what it was.

The Chief eyed the grenade warily. Was there enough time for people

to run clear, or would the resulting stampede cause more deaths? Was there enough time for him to throw it?

Better question yet, why did it look so similar to a UNSC fragmentation grenade?

Sparks began to fly off of it.

The Chief played it safe -well, safe for everyone else - and dived onto the grenade. He over pressurized the gel in his armour, hoping that his shields held.

The grenade went off. The Chief heard a muffled _wumph_ beneath him and his shields drained. He could feel the front of his armour become unbearably hot. Smoke roiled out from underneath him, but he knew this was just the after effects from the grenade.

He was alive. His armour had taken the brunt of the impact.

The Master Chief stood up. The crowds of people around him looked at him with awe clear to see on their faces. The two failed assassins were still where he had left them.

_What a great first day out, _he thought.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

"Sir, I regret to inform you that your assassins failed in their duty," said Marin.

He was in the Scientists office, a room as cold and barren as its owner. Malice seemed to permeate every surface of the room, as if it had soaked it in from its owner.

The scientist didn't even look up from his notes. "Quite alright," he said. "I had no expectation of them succeeding. I just wanted to see if this 'Master Chief' was all he's cracked up to be."

Marin nodded, pretending to understand.

The scientist looked up. "Take these down to factory," he said, holding out several leafs of paper. "The new data I have gleaned will help us finalize the plans there."

Marin grabbed the papers and left the room.

The scientist looked back down at this desk and began to carefully move around a small black case no larger than his thumb.

He smiled.

* * *

><p>Right, so... stuff. The Chapter was shorter than I would have liked, but I ran outta ideas for this one. So, if anyone has anything to say, leave a review. If not, enjoy the story, and keep on waiting for that Halo 2 redo. Or play Gnar.

7. Chapter 7

****'Ello.****

****so... yeah, here's another chapter. I was actually ridiculously lazy writing this one, briefly considered dropping the whole story out of sheer laziness. ****

****W/E. We finally reach a chapter in which the Chief interacts.****

****Enjoy?****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 7 - Well Enough Alone<p>

"You know, I generally don't like my city being blown up," said High Councillor Kolminye.

The Master Chief was standing in the Councillor's office, saying nothing. He honestly didn't recall the city taking all that much damage during the chase.

The office itself was, like before, immaculate. Everything was neat and tidy, the fancy walls spotless. The Chief could almost understand why she wanted to de-brief him in here rather than back outside where she had found him. It had a way of putting the 'damage' he had caused into perspective.

Not that he was admitting anything had been damaged needlessly. A battle was a battle, and things tended to get broken in them.

"I've gotten complaints from shop owners, demands to repair windows, roofs, and I also have to fix up the nice crater you left in the middle of Main Street," she continued.

Chief frowned inside his helmet. What was he to do, let the grenade explode? Naturally, he did not say any of that. He kept completely still in his normal ramrod posture, allowing the High Councillor to assume what she wanted to assume.

"All in all, though, I'm happy with the results."

The Chief tilted his head in question. Hadn't she just been reprimanding him?

"You've proven that you're a force to be reckoned with. No one's going to try anything like that again," she finished.

The Chief didn't respond. He had already told her that he wasn't here to solve her political troubles, and that seems exactly what she was implying. Then again, if it means he got on her good side, maybe he would get home faster.

"On to other news," she continued, "I've had my Summoners search for any trace of your home dimension, but as of yet we have been unable to. It's as if your 'UNSC' never existed."

The Chief bristled at the comment. He wasn't entirely sure if he believed what she said. She could just be trying to keep him here, pretending she couldn't find his home. He would have to always work with her for the promise of returning to a home she would 'never' be able to find.

He didn't say any of this, of course. He just nodded, seemingly content.

She smiled at him, but the smile didn't quite reach her eyes. "I also wanted to inform you that your 'assassins' have been _dealt_ with."

The Spartan tilted his head and nodded. He understood her meaning perfectly, and while he did not quite understand why she would kill two people loaded with possible information, he did not question it.

The High Councillor looked at him hard, then dismissed him with the wave of her hand.

The Chief left the room feeling like he had just been tested. The question was if he had passed it, or failed it.

Not that he cared one way or the other.

* * *

><p>The next few days passed in relative boredom. Chief stayed in his room the whole time, attempting to repair his armour and generally isolating himself from the rest of the Institute, sending Reighlen away every time he came by.<p>

Unfortunately, it proved far harder than he had expected to repair his armour. Most of the things that needed repairing were too damaged for him to fix with what he had on hand, and he would need the proper equipment and tools to even attempt to do so. While he could fix a tiny thing here or there, he would have to make do with it in its current state.

He figured that the High Councillor would send him home sooner " or attempt to, at least " if she saw how miserable and isolated he was. But even so, after two days the Chief couldn't stand to be in his room any longer. Staring at the same walls without anything to do was not something he was trained for. He wasn't capable of staying still and doing nothing.

Plus, it brought up memories of Cortana.

To take his mind of things, and to try and alleviate the boredom, he decided to walk around the halls of the institute, since he wasn't eager to go outside again and the training room would be full at this time.

He exited his room, checking the hallways for any signs that indicated the presence of assassins. This time, he made sure to bring his battle rifle in addition to his magnum and grenades. It would do a far better job than his magnum at putting hostiles down.

As he walked, he took note of every area that could be used to his

tactical advantage. It would help to know every room in detail, in case he was attacked inside or was required to help defend the institute.

He hoped it didn't come to that. If something like that were to happen, the High Councillor would be certain to prolong his stay here.

He stopped by one of the silver lined windows that were spaced along the hallway and looked out at the expanse of the League.

It reminded the Chief of Cairo Station, or any of the MAC stations that were littered around UNSC space, albeit one on the ground. It had the same sort of lines and curves, a deadly sort of elegance.

Someone cleared their throat behind the Chief.

He turned around, hand on his pistol, finding it extremely odd that he had heard no one approach.

The person behind him was his teammate from his last game, the winged angel figure with the golden armour. She stood a few meters away, her large, white wings folded behind her, her helmet in one hand. She appeared to be calm, but the Chief got the feeling that she was uncomfortable.

It made sense, seeing as he was feeling the same way.

"I don't believe we've ever introduced ourselves," she said and held out her hand. "I'm Kayle."

Chief didn't take the hand, wary of a trap. Instead, he kept his hand firmly on his weapon. "Master Chief," he replied, tensing ever so slightly.

Kayle noticed the tensing and brought her hand back. "I don't want to hurt you; I just wanted to talk."

"No," said Chief, and turned back to the window, hoping she would take the hint and leave.

She didn't. She walked up beside him and stared out. "You are a lonely soul," she said.

Chief sighed internally. Couldn't people see he didn't want to socialize?

"When I came to the League, I did so with the purpose to help my race, to bring justice," she said, still looking out the window. "I made a deal of servitude with the former high councillor, and even though I am no longer bound to that pledge, I remained. There are things I still need to do, justice that needs to be dispensed. This world requires it just as much as mine."

The Chief didn't understand what she was trying to say, or why she was even saying it in the first place. He did not care if she had abandoned her duty or not. It wasn't his business. All he knew was that he would never do such a thing.

She looked at the Chief. "I was like you, concerned with my duty to my people."

_How does she know that, _he thought, then that thought turned to anger. _I'm nothing like her_

"At first I had been anxious to be away from his place, to be back in the fight," she continued, "but eventually I came to realize that they didn't need me there all the time. I didn't need to babysit them. I had done what was required of me, and I needed to trust them to do what I required of them."

The Chief looked at her. While he wasn't the best at talking, and certainly not with females, he could tell where this was going and didn't like it.

"I don't know who you really are or where you came from, but I can guess enough. This place isn't as bad as you might think. I understand the burden of duty; but it's not yours to shoulder forever."

The air around the pair was pregnant with silence. Kayle shuffled her feet, the only sound in the otherwise quiet hallway.

The Chief finally spoke. "I have a duty to protect humanity. I need to go back."

"I understand that," she said, nodding, "but this place requires your help, too. You can trust the people here â€" they mean you no ill will."

The Chief rounded on her and gritted his teeth, his choler rising for some unknown reason. "I'm not a slave to this place"

She turned towards him and tilted her head, marvelling at the stubborn headedness of this man. Although it was quite possible he was a robot, as rumored. "This is a place where the best of the best unite to keep the peace. Even mortal enemies can become friends here. No one's a slave."

The Spartan took a step away from Kayle. "I don't need anyone," he said, his anger dissipating. He was a bit confused at himself; he was usually able to keep his emotions in check.

Maybe the words hit too close for comfort.

Kayle raised a knowing eyebrow. "You don't need to be afraid of loss," she said. "It is natural part of life in every universe."

The Chief wondered if the angel was also telepathic. She was reading him easily, despite the fact that she couldn't see his face or understand anything from his immobile body. It was disturbing.

"It was my fault," he whispered in a voice so tiny it surprised even him. He wasn't sure if she had heard him speak, but he sincerely hoped she did not.

She opened her mouth and looked like she was about to say something else, but the Chief stopped her. He didn't want to hear any more.

"Leave," he ordered, using the voice he had used on his Spartans so many times before. He did not know at which point in the conversation he had taken his hand off his magnum, but he replaced his hand there, balling the other one into a fist.

Kayle noticed his rising aggression and backed off, placing her helmet back upon her head.

"All I'm saying is that you should make the effort to be a part of the League," she said, backing down the hallway, palms raised towards him in a placating gesture. "You may be here longer than you think."

The Master Chief watched her retreat, then turned away and returned to his room.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

"Test subjects 4 â€" 9 all escaped and had to be put down," reported Marin, anxiously waiting for his employer to dismiss him.

The room was much like before. Its silver-grey walls were still relatively unadorned, giving the area a rather dark feeling. The only change, however, would be the addition of blueprints along the side walls. Each one indicated something oddly foreign, things that he was sure had never existed on Runeterra before.

The Scientist did not look up from the machine he was working on. "Is it not your job to ensure that this does not happen?"

Marin swallowed nervously. While he was not one to be intimidated by his employers, this one was an exception. This man had ambition and power, and Marin knew firsthand what he was capable of. "With all due respect, sir, I followed the parameters set down by your chief scientist. Everything had been calculated from the calculations you gave him."

The Scientist raised a single eyebrow. "Are you saying my calculations were off?" he asked, his voice dangerously low.

"Yes, Sir," Marin said. He would not lie; it was beneath him.

The Scientist laughed. "That means everything is progressing better than I expected."

Marin blinked. "If that is all, Sir, I â€" "

"Do you know what this is," the scientist asked, finally making eye contact. His hand was waving towards the machine he was working on.

"No," Marin said, unsure of why it was relevant, and even more unsure of why his employer suddenly felt like sharing.

The Scientist smiled. "This is the culmination of all our sciences," he said. "All our hextech, our techmaturgy, our necromancy, and a little extraterrestrial help. This is the game changer."

"I'm not sure I understand, Sir"

"This 'project' of mine has been years in the making, but we have never been close. And yet, in the span of several days, because of a single event, we are almost ready." The Scientist patted the machine fondly.

Marin clicked his heels together, hoping his employer would get the message.

The Scientist laughed and waved Marin away.

He left feeling more confused than before.

* * *

><p>RIGHT. So. Let me know how this chapter went, because I wound this ridiculously hard to write for some reason. I'm not really sure if I got the interactions i wanted down right, so let me know and I will endeavour to change it.

c ya.

8. Chapter 8

Hi. So... eh, here's another chapter. A chapter in which we get some real combat. yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay.

Have fun.

* * *

><p>Chapter 8 - Flawless Cowboy<p>

The Master Chief sat in the same position he had been in for the last day: at his desk, prodding Cortana's chip with his finger. At first he had tried to repair his helmet (again), but could not find what was wrong with the thing (again). He concluded that the parts underwent enough strain to break, and he would need to completely replace everything, which was sad seeing as how he'd only had the Mark VI for less than a week of active service.

So he sat down and just remembered: past battles, training, his Spartans, Cortana. He tried to think of where he went wrong, but he couldn't find any one thing.

When it came down to it, he just hadn't been good enough.

A knock at the door interrupted Chief's thoughts. _Probably the boy again, _he thought.

"Sir?"

_Definitely the boy. _

"Go away," Chief said, knowing from previous experience that if he stayed silent the boy would continue to knock. He had been raised on the idea of self-reliance, and having an assistant went completely

against that.

"Sir, you have a league game in ten minutes."

The Chief raised his head and frowned. He didn't have a league game scheduled. "Why was I not informed earlier?" he asked. He hoped this wasn't some plan to get him out of his room.

"It was a last minute thing," the boy responded. "It's a tournament game, and one of the Champions came down unexpectedly with the Shiver Fever. Three other Champions recommended you for the spot."

_That makes some sense, _The Chief thought. He got up and put his helmet back on before another thought occurred to him.

The Boy continued talking, though. "You see, normally Summoners choose champs, but since this is a tourney game, they let the others decide for synergy pur-"

"Who recommended me," he called out, genuinely curious.

"Um... I think it was Caitlyn, Vi, and Riven," he responded in a less-than-convincing tone.

Caitlyn and Vi the Chief somewhat understood. They had seen him in action first hand, temporary though it had been. Riven, thoughâ€ he had no idea who that was.

The Chief looked at his less than impressive armoury, debating on what to bring. After a few seconds of contemplation, he grabbed his usual: his MA5C, his M6H, and some plasma grenades. It was better off he kept the weapons he was most comfortable with. He jerked the door open, surprising the boy who stood just outside it.

"Okay," Chief said.

* * *

><p>Chief walked to the summoning platform, noting the figures already there. As he trekked by them to get to his spot, he gave them each a careful nod.<p>

Caitlyn was to his left, Vi was across from him, the white haired woman from the training room and a blonde woman in a whiteâ€ bikini? were to his right.

"Glad you joined us," Caitlyn said, tipping her hat at the Chief.

The white-haired woman stared at him intently. The Chief found it plausible that this was Riven, seeing as how she was the only one other than the Piltover duo that he recognized, though he was unsure as to why she had recommended him.

"Hey Tin Man," Vi called out, smirking. "Wanna make a bet? See who gets the most kills?"

Caitlyn turned to reprimand VI, expecting the Spartan not to answer. Vi's smirk was already fading fast as the Sheriff opened her mouth to speak.

"You're on," said the Master Chief, resulting in incredulous looks from the rest of the team.

The Chief figured that he should make the attempt to be friendly, seeing as how three total strangers had recommended him for a tournament game. If they had faith in him, he could try and put some faith in them.

Even if he had no expectations of staying.

* * *

><p>ENEMY DOUBLE KILL

The announcers accented voice reverberated around the Rift.

Chief peered out from behind the mid lane inner turret, looking at the fallen bodies of Caitlyn and Janna. Riven and Vi came stumbled through the gap in the trees to his right and took places beside him.

"Ah, shit," Vi exclaimed. Their team was behind as it was, and with two of their team members down the enemy team now had the perfect chance to push and end.

_We should fall back, _Chief's Summoner said.

The Chief analyzed the enemy team for a moment, thinking hard.

"No," he said. Vi and Riven glanced over at him. He had forgotten for a second that they could not hear his Summoner.

"We can't fall back now, or we lose. We need to capitalize on their lack of a minion wave right now."

"Okayâ€¦," Riven said slowly. "But it's a 3v5. I don't see how we're going to have a chance."

The Chief gazed over at the enemy team, years of training and warfare allowing him to formulate a plan instantly.

"Vi will engage on the light mage, and that will cause some disruption," he began, then pointed at the red-caped enemy top laner. "He holds his axe with his right hand. Riven, if you run right past his left hand side, he'll have trouble turning fast enough to hit you, unless he's willing to swing his axe around and hit his teammate. After that, engage the enemy samurai and keep him between you and the axe man. That will put you on the same side as Vi. I'll take the ADC and the Support."

Vi blinked a couple of times, then burst out laughing. "That is the ballsiest plan I've heard in a while," she said between tears, "and it'll probably get us killed, but it sounds like a hell of a lot of fun."

Riven nodded her consent, tracing the path she would take with her eyes.

"Trust me," said the Chief. "I've survived worse odds."

_I hope you know what you're doing, _His Summoner pulsed to him.

_I do, _The Chief thought back. It would not do for his teammates to hear dissent at this moment. _Just let me handle this._

"Be ready to use heal on my mark," he said to his Summoner out loud. He was using his command voice again. He nodded to Vi and Riven.
"Now"

Vi shouted and charged up her gauntlet, smashing aside the enemy team as she raced for the light mage.

Riven ran right behind her, heading right past the axe man, ready to engage the Samurai.

As Riven past him, Chief noticed the axe man tense his muscles, preparing to leap forward onto the exile. Chief quickly primed a plasma grenade and threw it as far as it could. It latched onto his targets armour and began to burn a blinding white.

The Chief ran towards the outlaw, hearing the explosion set off behind him.

Chief fired his assault rifle on full auto, getting closer to the carry, but suddenly he stopped dead.

You've been stunned

The Chief grimaced and looked to his left, seeing the enemy Gem Knight much closer than he anticipated. He forced his legs to move, and they did, albeit sluggishly. He grabbed his opponents shield, swinging himself around, landing closer to the adc. The Knight swung his hammer around in an arc, but the Chief caught it one handed and emptied the rest of his clip into the support chest.

He looked at the enemy adc, and saw him preparing to fire a large bullet at his team.

The Chief quickly reloaded and propelled himself towards him, not caring if the support was dead or not. He knew what he had to do.

He had done it twice before, and he would do it a third time. He had always been lucky.

Just as the bullet fired, the Chief backhanded it and sent it flying off course. The resulting explosion drained his shields, launched him away, and caused his indicator bar to start flashing red. It also blew away the axe-wielding man and the light mage. The Chief landed a little ways away, in a pile of stone, and noticed a bit belatedly that the announcer had not announced his kills. She was probably confused as to what had just happened.

The Chief coughed, his throat parched. He knew that if this had been real life, he would be coughing out blood.

He struggled out of the rubble of his first tier turret and made his way to where Riven was fighting the Samurai.

The Spartan tackled into his side, causing the Ronin's swipe to go

wild. The Samurai spun around, and the Chief fired his assault rifle into the gap between the two of them.

The Samurai summoned a wall of wind which blocked every round that had been aimed at him from the Chiefs direction.

But those weren't the only projectiles aimed at him.

A wave of destructive green energy passed right through him, slicing the Samurai clean in half.

This time, the announcer announced the kill.

The Chief noticed that his shields were recharging slower than usual, and his health indicator was still red. The strain they had been under might have wasted the shield's battery. "Mark," said Chief, and a green glow appeared, instantly recharging his shields and helping his teammates partially recover from their wounds.

Across from them, the enemy teams remaining forces got into position.

Although the tables had indeed turned on the enemy team, they were still in the better position, with much of Chief's team in a weakened state. Any protracted engagement would see his side beaten.

The Chief pointed to Vi and Riven, then pointed to the support, hoping they understood. Then Chief charged the outlaw.

Chief slide under a wave of buckshot, jumped up and smashed his armoured fist into the man's jaw.

The man retaliated by swinging his shotgun upwards, but the Chief was ready for the blow and dodged around it, aiming his rifle at the man's head.

The man, finally realizing he would not best the Spartan in close combat, dashed backwards and sent a smoke grenade flying towards him.

It impacted the Chief directly on the chest, and everything went black. His motion sensor detected nothing on the outside, but the Chief had already expected it to fail. He tried to claw at the air around his face, thin it out, but it wouldn't work. He realized it was like the darkness in the reflection chamber.

He rolled out of it and crouched, riddle raised, searching for his target.

There. The shot gunner was firing shots at Riven, who was deflecting them with some sort of runic shield.

Vi was on the ground, possibly stunned by the support, who was making his way towards his carry, hammer glowing green.

The Chief darted in between the two enemies and his two teammates, hoping to give them some respite.

There was a loud noise and a blast of light. Chief turned his head to see the supports' gems glow vividly, and aura of blue, purple and

pink light emanating around him. Chief had a bad feeling about it.

He looked to his teammates. They would need a few more seconds to recover.

The Shotgunner reloaded, grinning around his cigar.

Seconds they didn't have.

He glanced at the bush to his left: it was within diving range.

Could he hold them off at his base turret?

Chief knew what his former trainers would have said in this situation: _You're a leader, Chief, and you need to make the hard choices. You can't micromanage your soldiers, even though you __might want to. You need to keep focused on the bigger picture. People will die, and you need to ensure that you achieve your goal._

The Chief wondered what his goal was. He knew what the League wanted him to do, and what his Summoner wanted, butâ€|

But what did he want?

He glanced once more to the bush, then turned back to his enemies. He pulled his assault rifle into his body and aimed it with his right hand at the gem knight. He drew magnum with his off hand and aimed it at the outlaw.

He opened fire at the same time his enemies attacked.

* * *

><p>"You should have seen it! He went all cowboy on 'em, shooting and shit," exclaimed Vi. She was in the center of the group, enigmatically waving her hands as she spoke.<p>

"Yes, Vi, we know," Caitlyn said, rolling her eyes. Janna giggled.

For the first time, Chief walked side by side with the rest of his team. They were headed to the mess hall â€" _Cafeteria, _Chief corrected himself.

"And then finally the announcer got her shit together and called out the quadra kill. It was freakin' amazing!"

The Chief had already made up his mind to sit with the rest of the team. Though he really did not want to, it couldn't hurt to be around people for once.

"Although I still can't believe he beat me," Vi said. "I was sure I would win that bet."

Caitlyn sighed. "Honestly, Vi, would you be quiet for a single moment?"

Vi snorted, and the rest of the team laughed.

They grabbed a table near the middle of the room, at the Chiefs insistence. It was the most tactical spot in the room, and it allowed Chief to see everyone's movements. In the case of an attack, he would have plenty of cover around him.

The chair he sat on squeaked slightly in protest of his weight, but held. Everything was enchanted, it seemed. Or maybe just built to hold things heavier than him, but he thought that was less than likely.

Everyone else began to sit down, too, jostling each other for the 'best' seats.

"Mind if I take a seat here, too?" a smooth voice asked. "I've only just gotten away from that useless husband of mine."

The Chief glanced at the speaker. It was a very pale woman with white hair, and she was pointing to an empty seat near the Chief, her other hand holding a bowl of food.

"Sure thing, Ashe," said Janna. "Master Chief, this is Ashe, queen of the Freljord. Ashe, this is the Master Chief."

Ashe took the seat and nodded politely to the Chief. "So you're the new Champion."

"Anb a damn goo' un at dat, too," mumbled Vi, a leather strap in between her teeth. She was in the process of taking off her gauntlets, although Chief wasn't too sure why she was attempting to do so with her mouth.

The Chief decided it was about time to grab some food, so he got up, grabbed a plate from the side table, and piled his plate full of everything that looked appetizing (everything). He grabbed some sort of dark tea to drink, and went to sit back down.

"You're going to eat all that?" Janna asked. Her face turned slightly green as she stared at the food.

Chief looked down at his own plate. While Spartans could go for long periods of time without sustenance, they did require a lot of food to replenish all the energy their enhanced bodies used up. But he didn't say this, of course. That was classified.

Janna didn't wait for an answer, though. Soon everyone was engrossed in conversation â€" preparations in case of war in the Freljord, the hunt for someone or something called C, The likeliest team to win the championships, among other things.

The Chief reached his hands to the section of his helmet that locked to his jaw and manually released it. The helmet came free with a small hiss and he placed it on the table within easy reach. He began to dig in to his food.

Everyone stared.

"Tim Man human confirmed?" Vi said, eyes wide, a half smirk on her lips.

The Chief swallowed the bite in his mouth and met her gaze evenly.

"Why are you so pale?" asked Riven, never one for subtlety. "Do you live in that armour?"

Janna giggled at the Frost Archer, who looked down self-consciously with a frown.

"Yes," the Chief replied monotonely. He didn't understand why everyone was acting oddly.

Riven leaned back with wide eyes.

"Chiefâ€¦ where do you come from?" asked Ashe, who was stabbing some salad with a fork. "The only people I know that are that pale come from Freljord, but I'm sure I've never heard of anyone like you from there."

Vi and Caitlyn exchanged a knowing glance.

"UNSC space," he replied. Most people might have responded with their home planet, but the Chief had no recollection of his. And even if he did, it was probably glassed by now. It's not like he needed a home, anyways. The UNSC gave him everything he needed.

Ashe frowned before pointing upwards, and the Chief nodded. Everyone, with the exception of Caitlyn and Vi, leaned backwards and inhaled deeply. The Chief found it odd that people were amazed that he had come from space. They had mutants and magic and werewolves and interâ€¦dimensional beings, and they were not embroiled in a war with any of them. That was far more incredible than space.

"If you come from up_ there,_" Riven began timidly, "then how did you get down _here?" _

The Chief twirled his fork around, getting impatient. This was why he didn't eat with others. "After the battle of the Ark, I tried to escape through a slipspace portal in the _Forward Unto Dawn, _but the portal closed prematurely because of the detonation of the new Halo ring and the ship was cut in half. One half, I assume, went to earth, and the other ended up here."

Everybody around the table looked confused. VI just put her hands on her head and muttered, "Too many big words."

Janna glanced around the table, then said, "Chief, I think I speak for everyone here when I say you should start at the beginning."

The Master Chief sighed inwardly and put his fork down. He wasn't going to be eating anytime soon.

* * *

><p>AAAAAAAND CUT. That's probably the longest chapter I've uploaded so far. SO, if there's anything I can improve on, let me know. I'm still not so sure how I feel about the way I write combat scenes. On another note, I almost have a skillset done for the Chief. Should be cool.

****Or Not.****

****Meh.****

9. Chapter 9

****Sup.** So here's another chapter because, for some reason, more people read this story ever week. Am I missing something? So confused.**

****Anyways,** this chapter is not that chapter in other halo crossovers where the Master Chief 'spills the beans,' if you know what I mean. That comes in later. He doesn't trust anyone enough for that.

****Yet.****

****For Demacia!****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 9 - Once More, With Feeling.<p>

The Master Chief began from the beginning. He told them about first contact, the fall of Reach, the revelation of Halo, the battle for Earth, Delta Halo, the Ark. He left out every classified detail and anything that could cause a potential breach in security. He didn't take any chances, despite being an entire dimension away. He was particularly sure to emphasize that Spartans were s_elected _from existing troopers, just like ONI told normal marines.

By the end of the story, the Chief's throat was aching and dry from all the talking. It was the most he'd done in a long, long time. Everyone just stared at him with equal parts of shock and awe.

"And I thought the power struggle in the Freljord was bad," Ashe said, slowly shaking her head. "At least I'm not fighting a war to prevent my extinction."

Everyone at the table hummed their agreement. The Chief took the brief respite to grab his unidentifiable beverage and drain in it one gulp. While many would have grimaced at its bitter taste, he kept his expression neutral the whole time.

"Well, Tin Man, I can say you are a bigger badass then you were twenty minutes ago," said Vi. She had been the most excited out of everyone, asking questions about the capabilities of MAC's, the inner workings of slipspace, how AI's worked, and series of other questions related to spacecraft. The Chief could tell she was an inventor at heart. The majority of the questions he had left unanswered, though. It would be somewhat compromising if piltover suddenly had a magnetic accelerator cannon.

There was silence at the table. The Chief used it to quickly eat his food, hoping he could retreat as soon as he was done.

"So Cortanaâ€| yourâ€| AI, she was the one on the chip?" asked Caitlyn.

The Chief froze mid bite, his appetite suddenly gone. He had forgotten that Caitlyn and Vi had seen her data crystal before. He nodded slowly, putting his fork back down. He pulled out his dogtags and waved them in front of everyone, the chip glinting in the light of the room. Caitlyn sat back, mouthing an "oh."

The Chief put his dogtags away and looked down at his hands. Everyone was silent, which was understandable. It was hard to swallow that in another dimension, the human race fought a twenty-five year war to prevent the annihilation of their species. After a few moments he grabbed his helmet and locked it back into place. He nodded to everyone around the table, and then got up to leave.

He made it half way down the corridor before he heard footsteps rapidly approaching.

He turned around and saw Riven. She stopped a little ways away from him. "You shouldn't just leave," she said. "Being alone makes it worse."

The Chief frowned and shook his head. "I'm fine," he said, but didn't turn away.

"I know it's hard," she continued, trying to make eye contact, "but it gets easier with time. I was suspicious of everybody for the longest time. I know what you're going through."

The Chief looked at her, incredulously. This was not what he had been expecting, at all. "I don't need anyone," he said hollowly. To his ears, it seemed like he was convincing himself more than her.

Clearly she thought so, too. "Everybody does. I thought was better off alone for the longest time, but the past would always race up to me. As soon as I got here, things were better. Here, I can make a difference." She paused. "So can you."

"â€|Did the Sheriff put you up to this?"

A nervous chuckle. "Vi, actually. I owed her for something."

The Chief bit back the retort he was about to say. He knew what she said was true, in a way, even if he didn't like it, and even if she didn't really mean it.

The Spartan found it slightly amusing that Vi would be the one to - indirectly - give him a moral lesson.

There was an awkward silence.

A thought occurred to him. "Why did you recommend me for the spot on the team?"

Riven frowned and blinked, confused at the change in topic. "Well," she began, "do you remember that night in the training room? I didn't actually leave. Your armour reminded me of stuff in Noxus, so I assumed you were there to kill me. You didn't right away, though, so I went to the second floor to see what you would do, and I saw you train. I knew that you were a force to be reckoned with."

_So much for my Spartan senses and my motion sensor, _thought Chief. _I couldn't even tell that there was a second floor and someone was watching me. _He didn't say that, though. Another thought had already occurred to him. "Why would you recommend me if you thought I was there to kill you?"

"I took a chance," she replied, shrugging. "And you were worth the risk, I think. I like winning."

The Chief half turned away, then turned back to her. "I need a close combat weapon," he said. "My combat knife is not in an optimal state for close combat. Do youâ€¦ think you could help?" The Chief almost had to force the words out. While what he said was true, the last thing he wanted was to be around these Champions â€" or anyone, for that matter â€" longer than he had to be. But he also knew he needed allies, and Riven was willing to help him. Despite not knowing anything about her, he felt he could, at least, understand her. As much as a genetically modified super soldier can understand an exiled Noxian League celebrity, anyways. Or whatever the others had said she was. He had tuned himself out when Janna tried to relate Riven to the Arbiter.

She gave him a timid smile and said, "sure."

Chief nodded, suddenly exhausted. All this talking really took his energy away.

He turned and walked back to his room. When he arrived there, his first thought was to sleep. However much he wanted to do that, though, he could not. He needed to fix his motion sensor before he rested. He would need it if he was going out to town again.

He sat at his desk and was placing his helmet down when he heard a knock on the door.

"Can I help you with anything, sir?" asked the boy, sounding bored.

"No," the Chief replied instinctively. Then he remembered what Riven had said. "No, wait. I meant to say yes." He went to the door quickly, hoping the boy hadn't gone yet.

The boy stood just outside, a hopeful expression on his face. "Sir Iâ€¦ wow, you're pale." The Chief glared daggers at him, and he gulped. "But pale in a good way! Very fashionable. Soâ€¦ what can I help you with?"

The Chief paused for a moment, deciding if he really wanted to do this, then stepped aside and let Reighlen go through.

"I need some help with my helmets sensors," he said. "It hasn't been working for a while now. And my shields might need a new battery."

Reighlen nodded and began to prod around the helmet. The Chief wasn't entirely sure if the boy understood what he was saying, but he decided to just let him do what he could anyways.

After a moment of hesitation, Chief put his weapons away and joined Reighlen.

"You know, I can probably spice this up," he said, looking at the Chief with wide, excited eyes. "Put in an identifier system like the summoners have, maybe a team roster for league matches, stuff like that. I could probably put in one of the new micro-generator crystals, boost up your shield capacity. I think VI had some of those lying around."

The Chief was taken aback; clearly he had underestimated the boy. His knowledge of technology wasâ€¦ impressive, for a primitive human, to say the least. And while he really didn't want to mess up with ONI property, it was currently in his possession and having it in this state was a tactical liability. "So I take it you can fix it?" he asked.

Reighlen nodded. "Sure, sure. I'll just need to buy some new parts, replace some stuff, but I think I can help you out. Sweeten it all up."

"Iâ€¦ don't have any money," said the Chief haltingly. He hadn't really thought about the 'buying' aspect of the repairs.

Reighlen blinked. "You're a league champion," he said with a funny face. "The league pays you to be here."

The Chief just blinked. He had never, ever gotten paid for doing his job. "Are you sure?" he asked, just to be safe.

His assistant nodded again, that funny face still present. "You just gotta pick it up from the League Champion Service Office. It's all stored there in an account." He smiled proudly. "Learned that in my Summoner training classes."

The Spartan shook his head. He had never actually used credits, or gold, or any sort of currency before, and now that he actually had moneyâ€¦ he wasn't sure what he was going to do with it.

"Okay," the Master Chief stated. "Let's start."

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

Marin walked down the metal walkway, his footsteps echoing around the space. The walkway was one of many suspended above the metal cavern, each one leading to a new laboratory of arcane and forbidden sciences. He was currently on his way to see his employer, who was working in one of the more scattered laboratories.

Trust him to make his life just a little bit harder.

He calmly walked up to his employer, who was currently working on some sort of weapon system that Marin could not fully see.

Marin clicked his heels together to announce his presence, having no words to speak.

The Scientist didn't even turn. "This is yours," he said coolly, disinterested.

Marin bristled. No one ever talked to him this way, not even the brutal, tyrannical warlords that had hired him out in the past.

The Scientist turned around, holding a long weapon in his hands. It had graceful, organic lines and was long and cylindrical. It was black with lime coloured lights emanating from vents along the sides.

Marin looked up at the scientist. "Is it accurate?" he asked. He needed to be sure it was a good substitute for his traditional bow.

The Scientist gave a smile that looked more like he was baring his teeth. "It is more than sufficient for your needs. I believe that you will find it far more effective than your compact bow."

Marin picked up the weapon. It was far, far lighter than he had expected. He ran a hand down the side, feeling the smoothness of the weapon. There were several buttons along the side, near the trigger. He pressed one in, and a sight popped up. He peered through, and was surprised to see it had a higher magnification than his bows sights.

"I require this to be tested," his employer said, "before I create more weapons of similar designs."

"Do you have any specific targets in mind, or shall I choose?"

"I have someone," he said. "The first step in my plan. I trust you will do adequately." He handed Marin a card, which he took. He knew what would be on it: the time, date, name, and face of his target, as well as a map of his location. The rest he would have to figure out for himself.

His Employer turned away, dismissing Marin with a backwards sweep of his hand.

Marin bristled again. He was glad his mask hid his face from the world, or else it would be easy to see the fury etched on his face.

It didn't matter in the end, though. He didn't need anyone.

* * *

><p>Blarg. Unfortunately for me, I can't actually remember which line ONI used for Spartans. I wanted to look through the novels, but I didn't actually get around to it. I only remember a marine asking where he could volunteer, and a Spartan responding that they were selected or something. WE, hopefully you guys got the gist.**

And secondly, At first I thought it was OOC for our hero to ask Riven for help, but I kinda just thought 'screw it' in the end and left it the way it was instead of changing it. The Chief does ask for help once in a while from non-Spartans, so I guess its fine.

As every other time, if there's anything I could do better, anything you particularly liked or disliked, drop a review to help me out.

****Or don't.****

****Whichever comes first.****

10. Chapter 10

****SUUUUUUUUUUP.****

****And here's another chapter. Just to specify/recap: the Chief is 'going out' for weapons cuz he has yet to receive a second weapons shipment from the _Dawn_ which may or may not contain cc weapons.****

****Ahat else? oh yeah, the Chief is incapable of repairing most of his own shit, because logic. (According to the novels, he can only do really small things. THEREFOR, he needs others to get things done for him. And since his armour is pretty is becoming a liability...) ****

****Aaaaaand yeah. Enjoy? ****

*** * ***

><p>Chapter 10 â€" Exiles and Cyborgs first<p>

The Master Chief stood on a street filled with market stalls, each one selling all manner of exotic goods. Despite the fact that the Chief had money to buy things now, he didn't even bother to peer at their wares, knowing there was nothing that would interest him. He was currently waiting for Riven.

They had agreed the day before on a time to meet up, and naturally the Chief arrived an hour early, scouting out the area for potential threats. It also gave him time to test out his new motion sensor, and it was working perfectly. Civilians were marked by yellow dots, and potential hostiles were marked out by new blue dots.

The Chief had tried as hard as he could to think of a reason to not show up, but he couldn't. He knew that the _Dawn_ would carry no weapon small enough to serve as a replacement for his combat knife. In the end, he had no choice but to show up.

Everyone gave the Master Chief a wide berth; people seemed to recognize him and were still wary of what happened the other day.

A blue dot moved slowly towards him from behind, but the Chief didn't turn around, assuming it was Riven.

It wasn't.

"Why hello there," a feminine voice purred, practically in his ear.

The Chief turned around, giving himself enough room to use his magnum if need be.

The blue dot was a league champion - she had bright, curly, flaming red hair and wore a pirate hat. She smiled at the Chief with

half-lidded eyes.

"What's a big guy like yourself doing out here alone?" she asked.
"Need some company?"

"No," the Chief responded flatly. "I'm waiting for someone." He had no idea who this was, but she was being an annoyance. The Chief briefly wondered how much trouble he would get in if he hit a fellow champion of the Summoners Rift.

"Oh come on," she purred, moving closer. "I thi-"

"Sarah?"

The woman half grimaced and turned around, smiling as soon as she saw who had spoken. "Riven! I had no idea you'd be out here too!" She spread her arms wide.

Riven frowned and looked between the Chief and Sarah. "I'm helping the Chief out," she said.

The Chief quickly distanced himself from the red haired woman.

Sarah raised her eyebrows. "Wow, Riven," she said. "I didn't think you were this adventurous."

Riven blinked and clenched a fist, face reddening. Sarah began to smirk, putting a hand on her hip. The Chief watched the two of them with confusion, completely lost as to what was going on. This was one of those times where he was glad the mask hid his face.

There was a tense moment, then Riven turned to the Chief and grabbed his armoured hand. "Come on," she said, refusing to meet his eyes.

She led him down onto another street of stalls, away from Sarah's laughter.

"Who was that?" asked the Chief. While he really didn't care, he felt it would be wrong not to ask.

"That," said Riven, not meeting his eyes, "was Sarah Fortune, the bounty hunter. It isn't a good idea to get caught up with her."

The Chief didn't reply. He did not really understand what 'get caught up with' meant, but he planned on avoiding it.

A few people stared at the pair of them, some snickering at the sight of the white haired woman leading around the massive armoured knight. The Chief didn't understand the laughter, though, so he just ignored it.

The Chief looked past all the areas that Riven was leading him passed, committing them to memory. Eventually his eyes alighted on Riven's back, and realized she wasn't wearing what she usually did in the league. She wore civilian clothing, and it made the Chief feel rather awkward, though he didn't know why.

Eventually she led him to a medium sized shop in a rather busy area of the city. He could see all manner of weapons in the windows:

swords, axes, bows, long-swords, great-axes and more besides. There was a curious lack of ranged weapons, much to the Chief's confusion.

Riven led him inside, quickly letting go of his hand when a bell chimed through the store. A man walked in from a door behind the counter, wiping his sooty hands on his not-so-white apron.

"Riven, my dear!" he called out. "What brings you in today? More repairs?"

"Not today, Strum," Riven replied. She pointed her thumb over her shoulder. "My friend here needs a weapon."

Chief tensed slightly at the word 'friend'. It made him feel awkward. He wasn't here to make friends.

"Friend, eh?" Strum walked up to the Chief, eyeing him. He stuck out his hand. "I'm Strum, city blacksmith."

Chief took the outstretched hand and shook gently. "Master Chief," he said. No use in giving out his full title to someone he wouldn't see again.

"So, watcha looking fer, Mastur Chef?" The man returned to his place behind the counter and gestured to the weapons lined up underneath the glass.

The Chief thought for a moment. He had not given this much thought. What weapon did he want? He could get a knife to replace his now useless one, but any knife small enough to fit in his shoulder guard would suffer the same fate as his last one. He looked over the rows of weapons and decided that a short blade would be best, since he would be able to transfer his combat knife training to it. Or maybe he could transfer energy sword techniques instead. He'd have to test the weight of the sword first before deciding, though.

"A sword," he said. "Preferably short, forearm length."

The man nodded and began to stack weapons on the counter. The next hour passed with the Chief trying out different weapons (and failing) while Riven watched, laughing. Apparently energy sword techniques were meant solely for energy swords.

Eventually he decided on a short gladius, the blade slightly longer than the Chief's forearm. That meant the blade was more of a sword to the average person than a short-sword, but it worked fine for him. It was silver inlaid with black, and slightly serrated towards the hilt. It was a stabbing weapon, and it fit the Chief's combat style well.

Riven just kept laughing, commenting on how the Chief used his blade.

When Strum listed the price, the Chief had been going to pay the price of the weapon in full because he didn't know much about bargaining, but Riven stepped in and began to list off prices with Strum, eventually deciding on a price that was little more than half of the original.

As they left the store, Chief wondered why Riven had bargained for him. Was the original price that bad? The Chief realized that he had absolutely no idea about anything in this civilian environment. He also realized that he was actually glad he had Riven around. If nothing else, he would be able to see how to interact with these people.

They walked for a bit aimlessly until Riven said, "Why don't we go eat something?"

The Chief had to stop himself from saying 'no' automatically. Now that he was out, he might as well stay out. It would provide him the perfect opportunity to study the city, in case the data was needed later. Not to mention the fact that his last excursion out hadn't given him much time to study his surroundings. And he knew that no matter how much he'd rather be inside the Institute, he'd get bored of it soon enough.

They eventually arrived at a small restaurant on a side street. It had an outdoor seating area and an indoor one, and it seemed to be self-sit.

"This one's really good," Riven said as she led them to a table on the inside of the restaurant. The Chief took one look at the fancy wooden seat, then led Riven to one of the tables on the outside, which had stone benches for seating. Riven just shrugged and sat down, the Chief sitting across from her.

It was a lot emptier outside than inside, much to the Chiefs liking. He grabbed one of the menus lying in the middle of the table and began to browse through it.

It was many pages long and Chief actually had some trouble attempting to find what he wanted to eat. It was his first time at a restaurant, after all, and he wanted to get something good.

Riven was not having the same troubles he was, though. She scanned through the menu quickly and found what she wanted immediately. It seemed like she was quite familiar with this place, and the Chief told her so.

"I used to eat a lot here, before I got used to the League," she replied, downcast.

The Chief felt immediately bad for bringing out bad memories. He wanted to apologize, but didn't know how to do so properly, so he stayed silent. He continued looking at the menu, and eventually he found something on the menu he wanted: some sort of native fish with more fish as a side.

Riven called the waiter over, and they both placed their orders.

The man left, and silence fell.

Riven tried to start a conversation, and the Chief tried to not kill it, but he was unable to. He just had no idea how this 'socialization' thing worked.

Riven stared out at the large group of people entering the restaurant and said, "Are you really the last one, then?"

"What?" said the Chief; even though he was pretty sure he knew what she was talking about.

She tried met his eyes. "The lastâ€| Spartan? That's what you're called, right?"

The Chief nodded warily, wondering why Riven decided to bring this up.

"I know what it's like to be a lone survivor," she said. "It's the kind of thing you never really get over, especially if you're the last of a tight-knit squad."

Chief felt a rush of emotions and looked up, breaking the minimal eye contact he had with his visor on. "Spartans never die," he said, trying to take reign of all his feelings. "We're always listed as Missing In Action, even when there's proof of death. That doesn't happen often, though; Spartans tend to go missing a lot. Glassing tends to wipe away evidence."

"Spartans never die, huh?" she chuckled. "It seems like a nice sentiment, if not necessarily true."

The Chief nodded. Sometimes the tradition seemed more depressing than helpful, although he understood the need for it. Sometimes, though, he jsut wished they would get honoured in the way they deserved.

Riven chuckled a little bit louder, as if a funny thought occurred to her. "You know what? You're probably the only Spartan legitimately missing in action, and your command is probably certain you're dead, on account of that whole dimension collapse-y thingy."

It took a few moments for the Chief to understand what Riven was saying, but he let out a short snort when he did.

Riven gave him a bemused look. "Was that your laugh?" she asked.

The Chief shrugged and took off his helmet as their food was placed before them.

Riven gave him one more bemused look before turning to her food.

Chief's meal looked absolutely delicious. Riven's meal was a sandwich of some sort with a bunch of sides, and it looked equally appetizing.

The Chief dug in, enjoying the taste of the food and the memories it brought back.

Chief sitting on a beach, his Spartans around him, roasting Calamari they caught from the ocean as they waited for Mendez to get himself out of his 'predicament'.

Riven eyed the Chief over the rim of her water glass. "You know," she began hesitantly, "I could teach you a fighting style I know that would work well with your gladius. Because, after all, your style is ridiculous."

The Chief really didn't think his style was all that funny; it was just different. While it wasn't perfect, Spartans made do with what they could. Not to mention the fact that applying knife-fighting styles to a short sword wasn't flawless. It would still work in combat, though.

Nonetheless, the Chief accepted. It would do him some good to learn more about the fighting styles of Noxians, in case he needed to fight against them someday.

Riven smiled. "I have a condition," she said.

_Of course, _thought Chief.

"You have to go shopping with me. We can't have you wearing that armour out here all the time."

The Master Chief paled.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

Nightfall was still quite a ways away, but Marin wasn't going to wait for the cover of night to make his move.

His target was a Demacian noble currently stationed in the outskirts of Kalamanda. He had tracked the man for the better part of the day, and finally an opportunity presented itself.

The noble was going back to his room in the Demacian quarters to do paperwork.

Marin now sat just outside the building, hiding in the shadows of an alleyway. He checked the charge on his new rifle: primed.

His rifle was truly marvelous: it had many features and its design was aesthetically pleasing. It looked like something alien. The only problem he had was the glowing lights; he had to cover them up so as not to reveal his position.

Marin climbed up the ladder that he had placed in the alleyway and arrived on the roof adjacent to the building. He glanced around: no one was in sight.

He began to crawl, slowly. Once he reached the edge, he jumped across, and rolled once he landed. He stayed upright this time, padding to the window set into the side of the building.

It was unlocked: good. It would shave some time of the mission tome he had set for himself.

He entered the building, scowling in distaste at the blue and gold walls. He had always hated Demacian architecture.

He quickly moved off the main path into a servant's corridor. He followed the path up several floors, always pushing himself against the wall whenever he thought he heard someone close by, always ducking low when he passed a servants quarters or kitchen.

He couldn't be discovered. Yet.

Eventually he made it to the floor the ambassador was staying on. He made his way through the halls, and eventually made it into a large circular chamber from which a bunch of other hallways branched off. The floor was marble, but with a square of what looked like solid gold in the middle. If he hadn't been on the job, he would have grabbed a few of them to bring back.

Dead ahead was the hallway where his targets room was located.

And in the way of it were three burly Demacian soldiers.

"Halt!" one said, drawing his weapon.

_As if I'm gunna do that, _thought Marin.

He propped his rifle against his hip and pressed a button. The weapon began to reform, the barrel elongating and metal plates retracting. It took less than five seconds to transform.

He fired.

A beam of scintillating green energy struck the first guard, melting through his breastplate and mauling his chest.

The second soldier stumbled and ran forwards, sword raised high.

Marin, without moving his finger off the trigger, passed the beam over his body, neatly bisecting him.

Marin stopped firing and smiled, admiring his handiwork.

The last man stared open mouthed at his comrades. He shook a little bit. His fist turned white as he gripped his sword.

He turned to the assassin and hurled his blade with all his might.

Marin caught it one handed, and threw the blade right back at the soldier.

The soldiers face was briefly registered shock; and then turned to pain as realization set in.

Marin walked to the dying man and shoved the blade in deeper, ending his life quickly.

He pressed the button again, and the weapon reverted back to its original state. He checked the power gauge: three quarters full. Apparently, firing it in suppression mode used a hell of a lot of power. He'd have to be more careful when using it.

The assassin took a moment to admire his weapon. While arguably louder and larger than his old bow, it was much more effective. And it looked cool as fuck, which was always a bonus.

He walked forwards, making his way towards the door of his target. He

jiggled the doorknob: locked. He heard shuffling on the other side.

He raised his rifle and pointed it at the lock. The weapon discharged with a crack and the lock shattered.

He pushed open the door, and saw the Demacian ambassador standing in the middle of the room with a blade in his hand. The blade was clearly a two handed weapon, but the man held it one handed. The weight of the folded steel dragged the weapon point first to the ground, and the assassin snickered at the man's obvious incompetence.

The man paled at the sight of the weapon in Marin' hands. "W-w-what do y-you want?" he stammered out, backing away, letting the blade fall completely towards the ground.

Marin snickered again. There was nowhere for the man to run.

He calmly raised his rifle, and lined up the sights with the man's head.

"Your life," he responded, and fired.

* * *

><p>O.K.

So my intratubez has been down for the last few days, allowing me to replay Halo 4 on legendary. Such fun, Much wow. I always laugh when Del Rio orders Palmer to arrest Chief. Who in the hell would think that's a good idea?

ANYWAYS, ignoring my rant, just a few things on Marin. Since he's an OC character, you guys wont know what he looks like... so take a look at Arctic Ops Varus in the store or on the googles. Change the armour to a dark steel, and imagine it more like halo 4 CIO armour. Change the camo to black camo, and all the light-up-ey bits to green. BINGO, an assassin straight from the depths of wtf.

Again, if there is any part you guys didn't like, did like, or any mistakes I made, don't hesitate to point them out. This is still my first story, so I can use all the help I can get. Getting interactions down tends to be a bit difficult.

CYA.

11. Chapter 11

**Hello again. **

Has anyone noticed that all the chapter titles so far are Halo checkpoint titles?

Prolly don't care.

**I want every chapter to be one, but I seem to be using all the god ones that I remember fast. If anyone remembers any, please, let me know. I don't wanna replay all the early halo's 'till the Master

Chief collection comes out.**

CHARGE!

* * *

><p>Chapter 11 - Your Ass, My Size-24€| Boot<p>

"That looks really, really tacky," said Reighlen. He was currently sitting on the Master Chief's sofa, head propped on one hand as he examined the clothing Chief had put on.

The Chief glanced down at his civilian clothing: something on his legs called 'jeans' and a black long sleeved shirt. He didn't understand how this looked tacky. Then again, he didn't understand civilian clothing at all, so€|

He sighed. Reighlen seemed to take this as a sign that the Chief was pissed off (not true) and began to stammer, "But it's tacky in a good way! You know, really€| fresh€| and€| cool€|" he coughed.

The Chief looked at his clothes once more, and decided they were fine. "I'm going to the library," he announced, and moved to the open door.

Reighlen looked like he hadn't understood what the Chief said. "What? Just like that?"

The Chief didn't answer, he just began to walk. To him, there wasn't any point in saying anything else. The boy was likely to follow him regardless.

Reighlen closed the door and hurried to catch up to him. "You're really very odd around other people, you know that?" he said.

The Chief, again, didn't answer. He continued to walk, following the signs around the place to find the library. Reighlen followed him with a sigh of exasperation.

The Chief stopped abruptly, causing Reighlen to bump into his backside.

"Chief, that hurt!" he complained, rubbing his nose.

The Chief glanced back. "Did you hear that?" he asked.

"Hear what?" responded the boy, looking confused, but the Chief had already departed, moving towards the source of the noise. Even without his helmet, he was hearing was beyond that of a normal human, able to hear things from great distances. Right now, it sounded like people were fighting.

He moved fast, and soon found himself in the main hall of the League. On the ground floor there was a group of people arguing; three Champions from Demacia, three Champions from Noxus, and one lone figure in the middle trying to break it all up.

"Quit it, all of you! You are acting like children!" the center figure shouted. The Chief recognized her voice; it was Ashe, the frost archer.

One of the Noxians, a particularly dangerous looking redhead, waved a knife towards the other group.

"Not until these pigs say they are sorry," she said.

A small blonde in the Demacian group started at the words, balling her hands into fists, but was stopped by a hand on her shoulder and a sharp "Luxanna" from a heavily armoured man in the back.

The Chief wondered if the frost archer would be able to keep the two opposing forces from fighting.

It seemed unlikely.

The Chief knew he should leave. If he went down there, he would be doing what he said he wouldn't do: help the League solve its political problems.

He turned away; ready to find Reighlen and head to the library. He managed a whole 5 steps before he heard the clash of metal on metal.

He turned. Ashe was cowering beneath a hooded man with an arm blade, who was attempting to beat down the hand claws of a blue-skinned woman.

The Chief sprinted as fast as he could. For a Spartan, that was pretty damned fast, and he covered the ground in less than a second.

In an instant he stood in the middle of the group and pushed aside the two fighters.

"Enough," he ordered.

There was a look of disbelief on their faces. To them, the Chief had just appeared in their midst. He probably looked like a ghost, too, considering his paleness.

The vicious looking undead creature in the behind the other two Noxians licked its decayed lips, its gaze sweeping over the Demacians.

In an instant the Chiefs magnum was out and pointed at the creature's head. "Don't even think about it," he told it. The creature moved back, cowed.

A tense silence descended.

"All of you go back to your rooms," said the Chief. "You are league Champions. Act like it."

Another tense silence.

Slowly the two groups drifted apart, but not without muttering and dark glances at each other.

As soon as they were a safe distance away, the Chief holstered his magnum and held out a hand to Ashe, helping her up.

"Thank you," she panted. "Those guys were really getting out of hand."

"Why?" asked the Chief. While he wasn't really interested, he thought it would be a good idea to figure out what he had just gotten himself involved in, and if there would be any repercussion as a result of doing so.

"Well," began Ashe, checking her elbow for scrapes, "Yesterday a Demacian ambassador was killed in Kalamanda. There was a massive outcry from the Demacians: they think the Noxians did it, but they are denying it. The Noxians in Kalamanda actually had to withdraw from the city because there was a risk of violence."

"And so league Champions are trying to finish the fight," finished Chief. Ashe nodded.

While the Chief did not have a particularly strong grasp on politics in Valoran, he was sure an event like this would really cause tensions to rise, maybe force the Summoners into action.

The Chief wasn't too happy about that. It would mean he would have to fight, and therefor stay longer.

The Chief looked Ashe over one more time to make sure she was unharmed, and then walked away, intending to go to the library.

Ashe stopped him. "Why don't you stop by Gragas' bar tonight?" she asked pleasantly. "All of the League Champs go there. Well, most, anyways."

He turned and blinked. A bar? He had never been to one, though he knew marines loved them with a passion. But what would he do in a bar?

It was then that he realized he hadn't said no automatically. Probably because he had spent all of yesterday saying no to Riven's ridiculous outfit ideas. Even he could say no only so many times.

Ashe was still looking at him expectantly.

"Maybe," he said at last, and walked away.

* * *

><p>The Chief made his way towards the bar area, which was in a large wooden building just separate from the main Institute. The Spartan had to admit to himself that it was pretty smart to do that: it would avoid drunken super-powerful Champions from ruining the place. Probably. Hopefully.<p>

Light spilled from the windows of the structure and he could hear laughter coming from inside. Two people were standing just outside the door, deeply entwined.

The Chief tried to ignore them, swerving around to reach the door.

The pink haired one gasped and the one in the purple dress looked around to see if anyone heard â€œ

That's when the Chief recognized them. He tried to speed up to doge the Sheriffs gaze, but she locked on to him immediately.

"Chief!" she cried, pushing Vi away from her, which did not work so well seeing as how Vi was the one against the wall. Although it did succeed in giving the enforcer a bruise.

The Chief stopped, scratching the back of his head, and not making eye contact. "Sheriff," he greeted politely.

Caitlyn blushed. "It's not what it looks like," she stammered out. "There was something in my hair, and Vi was helping me outâ€œ|" she trailed off. Vi snickered.

The Chief nodded diplomatically. The whole situation was rather awkward for him and he wanted to leave as soon as he could.

"Whatcha doin' here, Tin Man?" inquired Vi. She as leaning against the wall, seemingly content.

The Chief shrugged in response. He wasn't really sure himself why he had decided to come by. It was definitely not for the alcohol: he had never consumed any and likely never would. It wasn't to socialize, either. He assumed it was just curiosity; the fact that he was able to do things he was forbidden from doing before.

And the fact that there was nothing else to do around here.

"Well, don't let us keep ya," Vi said, pulling Caitlyn close once more. The Chief turned away sharply and entered the building.

Inside it was a ruckus of noise. People were talking and dancing and drinking.

The Chief sat down at the bar, gazing around the room. There were Champions, assistants, Summoners and aides but no one was armed, and he recognized no one. Not that he expected to; he only knew a handful of Champs, after all.

The large bartender â€œ" who he assumed was Gragas â€œ" came up to him, asking what he wanted to drink. The Chief just asked for water, earning him a confused look.

As Gragas brought him the drink, someone gracefully sat beside him.

The Chief glanced over and saw that Ashe was beside him.

"I'm glad you came by," she said, watching the crowd of people. "It's a much more fun than being in your room the entire night."

To the Chief, it sounded as if she spoke from experience, but he didn't comment on that. She may not have meant anything by it. Instead he said, "Not the kind of place for a queen."

Ashe gave him a sidelong glance and a grin as if sharing a secret. "It's a fun getaway," she said. "Can't be ruler all the time."

"You can never get away from what you are," said the Spartan, earning him a brows-raised look from Ashe.

"Interesting piece of wisdom," she said.

Chief shrugged. "A teacher told me that." He didn't elaborate any further, unwilling to explain the reasoning behind the phrase that Dã©jã had told him. It would probably reveal too much.

There was a crash from the other side of the room. A large, muscular man was flipping over some tables, much to the disapproval of Gragas.

"Here he goes again," Ashe said, face palming.

"Know him?" asked Chief. The man was drunk enough for Chief to consider him a threat.

Ashe sighed. "He's my husband." She sounded displeased.

Chief blinked and tried to picture the drunken muscular man with Ashe, but failed.

Ashe stood up and walked up to the man, placing a restraining hand on his arm and telling him to stop. He responded by pushing her away, grabbing a full glass and draining it in a gulp before smashing it against the table. The drunker patrons cheered.

Ashe walked back up to him and said forcefully, "Tryndamere, stop. You're drunk." She was loud enough, and her tone royal enough, to cause some of the drunken patrons to quiet down.

Tryndamere's smile faded. "What did you say to me, bitch?" he asked venomously.

"I said, yo-"

That was all she managed before Tryndamere slapped her in the face, hard.

The bar went silent.

In an instant the Chief was in between Ashe and Tryndamere, a mirror to what had happened earlier that day.

Tryndamere smiled up at the Chief, but the smile didn't quite reach his eyes. He laughed loudly, moving closer to the Chief as if to intimidate him into submission.

The Chief wasn't in the least bit fazed.

The Master Chief, like most Spartans, wasn't overly muscular like Tryndamere. They needed to be lithe and able to wear their armour. Their true strength lay in their muscle density: he could be half the size of an opponent and have ten times their strength.

He knew he could beat the man before him.

But was he allowed? He was sure that hitting Champions was against

league rules. The Chief couldn't allow himself to be kicked out; his chances of returning home would be less than zero.

But then again, Tryndamere _had _struck the first blow.

It was then that the Chief realized had gotten himself into another political situation. Standing between a queen and her king? He probably shouldn't be here. He didn't even belong here.

Tryndamere looked down at his wife and snickered as he saw her struggle to get up.

The Chief's thoughts evaporated and he set his jaw and propelled his hand forwards.

The blow connected, and even though the Chief had pushed lightly with an open palm, Tryndamere was knocked back several steps.

Tryndamere scowled at the Chief and tried to move towards him, but in his drunken state all he did was stumble and fall over. The rest of the bar patrons laughed.

Chief looked around for Ashe, meaning to help her up, but found that she was already on her feet. Her mouth was set in a grim line as she nodded to the Chief in thanks. She grabbed her husband and began to drag him outside.

Everyone began to talk and drink and dance all at once, as if nothing had happened.

The Master Chief just shook his head. This really wasn't the place for him at all.

He turned on his heel and left, leaving his water on the counter.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

"That was good work," said the scientist.

Marin nodded his thanks, standing rigid. He didn't need gratitude, his job was his job. Only fools needed recognition for what they did. What was glory from citizenry compared to the ability to shape nations from the shadows?

The man put his hands together. "Everything is moving along just as planned," he said. He ordered Marin out with a nod of his head.

Marin walked out, each footstep carrying him away from his employer's cold inner sanctum. He paused for a moment and looked over the railing at the production below. It was a mess as the engineers frantically tried to put together their final products. Most of them, he knew, were still in the earliest stages. They would be perfected over time, each iteration deadlier than the last.

As he walked away, Marin swore that if he listened carefully enough, he could hear his employer saying "soon, soon."

Influence from the shadows, indeed.

* * *

><p>And there goes another chapter. Hope you guys enjoy it. I can't actually tell if half of what I write is good or not, so...

See you next time?

12. Chapter 12

Chapter 12 - A Champion to steer by

The Master Chief sat in the cafeteria, eating his lunch of eggs and a meat sandwich. The room was mostly empty, which was more than fine by the Chief.

Ever since the day he had stopped the Noxians and the Demacians from fighting and had punched Tryndamere, rumors spread about him. At first he had tried his time honoured technique of isolating himself until everyone forgot about it, but a day later he was called out for a league match. Despite him resolving to not draw attention to himself during the match, he got a pentakill and won the game by himself, and the rumors started again.

So the Chief decided to just take the rumors head on, assuming they would be over as soon as people saw him act the way he usually did.

Doing nothing at all.

The Chief had to admit to himself, though, that it was rather boring doing this. Without a galactic war to fight, The Chief had no idea how to pass the time. It was all very unsettling.

"Mind if I sit here?" asked a soft female voice. Chief recognized it immediately. He glanced to the right to see Riven standing there, holding a plate of noodles. She was wearing her usual outfit of robe, corset and mismatched armour, unlike the Chief who was wearing his unusual outfit of civilian clothing.

He shrugged, and Riven sat across from him. She was holding a pair of sticks and was twirling noodles and shoving them into her mouth.

"So," she said, slurping the noodles, "I heard you smashed Tryndamere's face in."

The Chief sighed internally. Rumors were like wildfire.

"I didn't hit him that hard," he said. Riven snickered.

"Don't worry," she said. "I would have done it too, he's a total dick. The first time I joined the league, and he saw my sword, he tried to hit on me. And he was married."

The Chief raised his eyebrow, which was, aside from the laugh in the restaurant, the most emotion he had shown to Riven.

Riven just shrugged and continued twirling noodles around the sticks. Chief grabbed his sandwich and finished it with two quick bites, and started on his eggs. He reasoned that if he ate faster he could leave quicker.

"You eat a lot, you know that?" Riven said through a mouthful of noodles.

Chief did know that, in fact. He wondered how much he wanted to tell her. He decided it was safe to let a little bit of information out. "Genetically enhanced body," he said finally. It not like that information was very secret, either. Even the half-human Heimerdinger had guessed. "Need lots of food."

He paused for a moment, then added, "And this is a lot better than military rations."

Riven laughed out loud. "Bad where you came from, too, huh? Back in Noxian army, it literally tasted like manure."

The Chief thought that Riven's laugh sounded pleasant.

He dismissed the thought.

Then he remembered he was still wearing his supply belt, which included his half-full ration pack. He hadn't eaten very much during the siege of earth and the events that had followed. He took out one of the ration bars, and held it out to Riven.

Riven eyed the condensed nutrient bar warily, like it was a snake ready to strike. "Is that what you ate?"

The Chief nodded, and she grimaced but took it. "It looks utterly tasteless and textureless," she complained, but took a bite anyways. Immediately her grimaced turned into a full on gagging motion.

The Chief allowed himself to smile.

"Ohâ€¦ that tastes TERRIBLE. Is that thing supposed to be lemon flavoured or something? Because whoever thought of that should be killed."

The Chief gave a snort, and Riven smiled.

"How did you guys survive living off of that?" she asked, holding the bar for a moment longer before throwing it away.

"Only half of us died," Chief said. It took Riven a few moments to realize he was joking and laugh.

They both turned back to their food.

"I'm glad you decided to wear some clothes for once," She said, gesturing towards Chief with her sticks. "Much more comfortable than armour."

Chief shrugged. "I'm still wearing my under suit."

She snorted and went back to eating.

The Chief decided that he could try eating a little bit slower.

* * *

><p>The Chief spent the rest of the day with Riven. Most of the time was spent in the training room, with Riven teaching him techniques for his new gladius. Shockingly for the Chief, he wasn't the least but disturbed that there were other people in the training room watching him.<p>

He put it down to being eager to learn new combat styles, but he wasn't sure that was the whole reason.

The rest of the time, the pair of them had just walked around the halls of the Institute while Riven bombarded him with questions about the UNSC and the human-covenant war. He answered all her questions, except for the classified bits, and it ended up making him feel a little bit homesick. His thoughts had turned to Johnson, and Hood, and Miranda, and Cortana, and even the Arbiter.

It had been enough to spoil his relative good mood, and he left Riven alone in the hallway earlier than he would have liked.

He returned to his room, but was stopped just outside by a man who was covered in metal from head to toe. The Chief tensed up slightly, half expecting a fight, half expecting a trap.

"Ah, Spartan-117," the man said. "The Master Chief. I'm glad to have finally met you."

The Master Chief knew he shouldn't have been surprised at the greeting, but he was anyways. Content with the knowledge that this man was not yet trying to kill him, he relaxed his pose to a more casual position. "Who are you?" he asked, not bothering to ask how the man knew him. If it wasn't from the fact that he was the new guy, or from the rumors spreading around, it was from the plaque on the door.

"I am Viktor, The Machine Herald." The man " Viktor " stood a little bit straighter at that, if it were possible. His posture was even more ramrod straight than the Spartans. "I have come to gain your assistance for my Glorious Evolution."

The Chief blinked and said no right of the bat. The last thing he was interested in was aiding random political parties for even more random sounding plots.

"Master Chief. You are the perfect person, the perfect blend of the weak and the strong, the flesh and the machine. You are the key. Together, we could propel Valoran forward into an age of technological prosperity, free from the constraints of flesh and blood."

The man completed his proclamation with a wide sweep of his arms to the sky/ceiling.

The Chief frowned. To him, that sounded like a terrible idea " but, again, he wasn't here to get caught up in political problems.

"No," he said again. "Now please leave."

Viktor tilted his head, an oddly human gesture for one so obviously machine. Though the Chief could not see the man's eyes, he could tell that, had they not been in the League, Viktor would have done something exceedingly foolish.

"I shall take my leave, but I beg of you to reconsider."

The Chief watched the man leave, and then waited a few more minutes to make sure he was really gone. He then retreated back into his room. He scanned the room thoroughly, making sure Viktor had not bugged it.

And then he just sat there, clutching his dog tags.

He had briefly considered going to the High Councillors office to see if they had made any progress on getting him back home, but he was sure that with the recent assassination and the rising tensions between Demacia and Noxus they would have their hands full.

What would Cortana want him to do in this situation?

She had always told him in the past to 'go out there' and 'make friends,' but would she say so even when stuck in another dimension? When humanity was possibly fighting for their lives on the other side?

Could he afford to be lax?

He sighed, turning her chip over and over in his hands.

He knew what she would say. Something along the lines of 'stop being an anti-social Neanderthal and get out there. You can't be expected to hold everyone's hand.'

The Master Chief lay back on his bed, trying to decide what he wanted to do.

He stayed awake the entire night.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

Marin walked along the cold metal corridor, descending deeper into the complex. The walls were inscribed with runes which Marin couldn't read, proving the age of this place.

He found it faintly interesting that such an ancient place hadn't been discovered before, but considering the city it was locating under, it wasn't much of a surprise. He wasn't even sure if the people in power even knew half the things that went on beneath their precious realm.

He passed by engineers and scientists but he ignored them and they ignored him, which suited Marin just fine. Anything that wasn't part of his current job was an impediment.

He eventually reached a metal door, almost twice his height. He

looked to the left, as his employer had instructed, and found the panel. Despite its out-of-this-world appearance, and his instinctive apprehension of it, he placed his hand on it, and it lit a bright blue colour. The door clicked and slid open a moment after.

He walked into the large room, taking in his surroundings. There was a metal walkway high above the room. The room itself was filled with large tracts with a new spec of automaton on it. There were mechanical arms of some sort working on each one, screwing in bolts and sealing metal carapaces together with beams of pure magic. Power crystals were stored in large containers in the back, and they gave off synchronized hums and pulses of energy every few moments.

The arms gave Marin a strange feeling. Their purple sheen gave them an out-of-this-world look, and it disturbed him greatly.

"Sir," a female voice said from behind Marin.

He turned around, suppressing the urge to lash out at the person who snuck up on him. The Scientist was blonde, eager, and looked all too young to be here.

He used his arm to gesture to the Automatons. "Is this it?"

The Scientist nodded. "These are just prototypes," she said. "If they work out, we'll mass-produce more of them."

Marin nodded, but wondered how they were going to mass-produce anything in this room. It wasn't close to being big enough for that purpose. Not to mention the fact that they looked already mass-produced, but that was less important.

The Scientist licked her lips. "The Doctor said you would be able to help us test the automatons."

Marin turned his head sharply.

This is new, he thought.

"Did he give you anyâ€| guidelinesâ€| regarding the testing?"

The Scientist looked a little bit confused. "No," she said, putting her hands together. "He said to trust your judgment."

Marin nodded his head and turned back to the machines. "Then I have the perfect target in mind."

13. Chapter 13

Chapter 13 - Dead or Alive...Actually, Just Dead

The Master Chief stood in the middle of the training room, going over every technique Riven had shown him.

Swing up, down, flip blade, slash right, spin, low slash left, reverse blade, stab up, feint back, slash right, slip blade, pull down, disarm.

The Chief was a fast learner, and found the technique fairly easy to

master. It involved him using his momentum to carry the blade in arcs that would disarm any opponent that tried to block them. It wasn't all that dissimilar from Elite combat styles, except they didn't disarm opponents. They cut right through them " blade and all.

The Chief assumed that was pretty easy to do so when you're using a blade of raw plasma.

He went through the motions again, faster this time.

Swing up, down, flip blade, slash right, spin, low slash left, reverse blade, stab up, feint back, slash right, slip blade, pull down, disarm.

Each cut of the blade caused sent a whooshing noise around the room.

Eventually he would add his own flair into it, motions from other combat styles he'd mastered. For now, though, he just needed to make sure the basic motions were engraved in his head. He needed to be able to do this without thinking it or seeing the blade.

And besides that, he wanted to know this Noxian technique inside and out. He didn't know if he would ever be forced to fight one, but it was always good to be prepared.

He was so engrossed with his training that he had not noticed it at first. Eventually, though, he realized something was amiss. Voices were louder than usual, footsteps echoed much louder and more regularly.

People were yelling and running.

He sheathed his blade and moved towards the source of the noise. The hallway outside was relatively uncrowded, most of the people already having run by in the general location of the main hall. He began to walk, his long strides carrying him faster than the people sprinting. He walked into the main hall, where many Champions and Summoners were talking loudly.

Down the length of the hall, just outside the entrance at the gates of the League of Legends, a massive blue fire raged. Several Summoners and Champions were there, attempting to put out the blaze. The Champions were taking turns dumping water on it and blowing on it while the Summoners tried to invoke arcane magik.

They appeared struggling. The fire was barely flickering, its form a massive wall of immobile flame.

Even worse than the fire, Chief could hear the sound of gunfire coming from the city.

He needed to know what was going on.

He searched the crowd, looking for faces he knew, people he trusted. While that wasn't very many people, his gaze alighted on Reighlen, his assistant. He moved towards him, and people automatically made way for his armoured form.

"What's going on here?" he asked his assistant.

If Reighlen was disturbed or surprised by the Chief's sudden appearance, he didn't show it. "Apparently we're under attack," he said, eyes glued to the fire. "Like, ten minutes ago that fire appeared, right? And then there a bunch of loud noises started coming from the city, like fighting and bullets n' stuff, but no one can go over there and check because the main entrance is blocked off. And it seems to be resistant to magic or something, because the Summoners can't put it out."

"Has anyone tried exiting form the Reflection Chamber entrance?" asked Chief.

Reighlen shook his head. "No one's allowed to go through there. The doors only open one way, anyways."

Chief grunted and stared at the ethereal fire. Civilians would be getting hurt out there. Human civilians.

The Chief made a quick a decision and hoped that luck was on his side.

He began to sprint, heading straight towards the flames. He increased the strength of his forward and flank shields, reasoning that they would take more damage than his rear shields.

People began to move out of the way, staring slack-jawed at him or shouting. He ignored them all. He was just in front of the roaring fire now, and he ran right through it before he could think about what he was doing.

His helmet warning systems went off immediately, filling his HUD with red lights and caution symbols. The fire was so hot he could feel it through his armour, bodysuit and gel layer. His helmet's air scrubbers were at their maximum trying to filter all the smoke out. Some still made it through, though, making him cough.

And suddenly he was through.

His momentum carried him a few more paces before he stopped, and he breathed in the not-so-smoky air. His shields had been drained by nearly three quarters, and he feared what it would have done to his armour. It was hot as plasma, at least.

The sound of gunfire was more distinct now. The noise was more like a whine, though, than a gunshot. It sounded out of place and was maddeningly familiar, but he just couldn't tell what it was.

The screaming was also more distinct. There were crowds of people just outside the Institute, clearly wary of the unnatural fire but unwilling to distance themselves from the place they considered safest. As soon as he stepped into their midst they were around him, some trying to grab hold of his armour as if it would protect them, but unable to find purchase on the slippery energy shields.

He made his way past them, and reached around for his MA5C before remembering he had left it in his room. No matter, he still had his pistol and blade.

He drew both and headed towards the sound of the fighting.

He passed through the main road, and as he walked through the deserted side-streets, he realized that the police had done a much better job than he anticipated. They must have isolated the attackers to one small section of the city, or evacuated everyone out.

All of a sudden his motion sensors pinged " on red dot, one blue dot " and the wall just ahead of him on his right exploded outwards.

A mech of some sort hit the wall on the opposite side and raised its left arm, which ended in an outlandish " looking gun.

A man stepped through the ruined wall, carrying a large hammer. "Power Slam!" he yelled, leaping to the mech and smashing it to bits.

The Chief lowered his pistol, which had been aimed at the mech, for clearly the man was a League Champion.

The man wiped his brow, then looked at the Chief with recognition. "Master Chief," he said in a tone that sounded like relief. "Riven said you'd come. I'm Jayce, The Defender of Tomorrow."

Chief nodded in greeting before saying, "What's going on? And where's Riven?"

"A bunch of these Mechs hopped of the supply train and began attacking. Riven and a few other Champions are fighting the bulk of the automatons in the city plaza. I'm picking off all the ones that escaped."

The Chief knew where the city plaza was, so he nodded his thanks and set off.

"Good luck," said Jayce, and it seemed like he meant it.

After a moment of consideration, Chief replied with "good hunting."

One thing was bothering him, though. If the enemy had come from the supply train, how did they get close enough to the institute to start a fire? And if they had been close enough to start it, why would they not attack the institute itself?

He moved quickly, hearing the sounds of the fighting intensify. The streets stayed deserted, but there was the occasional smashed mech on the ground. There were also signs of battle along the walls and on the ground: scorch marks and blade marks and bullet holes and lines of molten stone.

While he was sure the signs would look foreign to any soldier from Runeterra, it was all too familiar to the Chief. He'd seen it over a hundred times before, in every place the Covenant decided to invade.

He was close, now. He detoured through the houses, unwilling to charge right in. Thankfully, the houses he went through were devoid of life. He really didn't want to have to deal with civilians in hiding.

He stopped to peer through a window. He could see the main plaza, and the battle raging there.

There was Riven, fighting alone on the flank, holding off three of the automatons. Each one had a blade, shaped like a leaf on its right arm. Its edge glowed a bright, sickly blue. Each slash they made cut glowing lines into the stone around them, but Riven's blade seemed intact " well, as intact as it could be.

There was Vi, fighting with a group of police officers in the center. The ground around them was littered with the pieces of fallen automatons. There were just as many human bodies there, too.

There, near the back lines, was the cowboy, fighting alongside a girl in ornate red armour. Blades floated around them, blocking incoming attacks as the Cowboy launched card after card into their midst.

All in all, the Chief reasoned the Champions were doing well. There were less than fifteen automatons left.

Although the Chief was once again confused. Only five Champions had been in the city? There were usually more on any given day.

The Chief didn't dwell on his thoughts, however. This wasn't the time.

He studied the armaments of his enemy for a bit, making sure he wasn't about to attack enemies without the proper intel. Each one's arm ended in a weapon. They had a slightly hunched appearance, and their backs carried a large, hump-like power generator. Their legs were double jointed: one bent back, one bent forwards.

They were sickeningly familiar.

He noticed a flash on the roof across from him.

Not wasting any time, he quickly jogged up the stairs, getting onto the roof of his own house. Each footfall sent creaks across the wooden framework.

Across from him, on the opposite roof, he could see that two automatons were maneuvering into a position where they could rain fire down onto the Champions.

Chief raised his magnum, lining up the sights with the closer one's head. He switched between the targets a few times, knowing he would need to be quick.

He fired twice in quick succession.

Two headless automatons fell to the street below. The sound of the magnum stopped everyone for a second. They looked up. Chief dropped down, not one to miss an opportunity.

The Automatons all immediately switched focus to the Spartan, ignoring everyone else.

Chief fired his magnum, diving into the mass of metal and began to lay waste with his gladius.

Time slowed down.

He swung up, cleaving a metal chest in half before bringing the blade down again, shattering the automaton in half.

He flipped his blade and drove it into the head of the automaton to the right of him before spinning around and cutting the legs off of two more metal constructs.

He took several hits then, bringing his recently re-charged shields down a quarter.

He reversed his blade again and drove it up, under the chin of the closest mech. He dove back just as another enemy opened fire on him.

Unfortunately, he dived into another automaton, and his momentum caused the enemies swinging blade to puncture his shields and cut a shallow furrow into it.

The Chief gritted his teeth, angry for making such a stupid mistake. He slashed at the automaton in several tight arcs, taking off each of its limbs.

Another enemy landed a blow on him, cutting another groove into his armour. Bullets impacted his side, scorching the paint a bit and making shallow dents.

Time began to speed up just as the rest of the Champion dived in, too. The bullet " shooting enemy was cut down by Riven, who ran to the Chief's side to make sure he was fine.

Vi smashed in the heads of two more automatons as The cowboy tossed a trio of cards, killing couple more. Chief fired his magnum, emptying the clip and killing the rest. The red armoured woman had her blades stab into fallen enemies, making sure they were truly out of commission.

Chief looked around, making sure there were no enemy reinforcements incoming. Even though his radar detected nothing, he wasn't about to trust it with his life.

The area appeared to be clear.

The Chief looked at the police, who were standing a little ways away. Many of their companions were lying dead around the area, killed by burning bullet and heated blade. Despite this, however, they stared at the Champions with awed expressions. It was probably the first time they had seen people kill so effectively.

Chief looked up, suddenly feeling angry at the sights around him. Wherever he seemed to go, death followed. He knew, without a doubt, this was all his fault. The way the automatons had ignored everyone as soon as they had seen him, their general design, their weaponry " it was like he brought the Human-Covenant war with him.

He shouldn't be here. He was more detrimental than anything else.

He caught a glimpse of a shadow moving on one of the buildings. He

reloaded his magnum, staring at the shadowy patch, wondering if it was an enemy, a civilian, or just his adrenalin-pumped imagination.

"What's wrong?" asked Riven, sheathing her blade.

Chief looked down at her. She had several cuts and burn marks across her body. Her clothes were pretty much ruined. Her hair was slightly singed.

And still she was making sure he was okay.

Chief glanced back, seeing that the shadow was gone. He wondered if he should go after it.

He looked back at Riven and met her eyes. When had they gotten so red? It was like liquid fire had been poured into them. They had never been this vivid.

Was it the thrill of the combat?

Or maybe he had just never noticed.

He knew there were a lot of things he never noticed because of his daily life of combat.

"Nothing at all," said the Master Chief finally, holstering his weapons and putting a hand on her shoulder.

* * *

><p>I really hate this chapter. Don't know why, but... It just doesn't feel right to me. If anyone has anything to say about it, please do. Reviews are greatly appreciated.

I guess... See you next update...?

14. Chapter 14

Chapter 14 "A Whisper in the Storm"

"I'm sorry, but you just can't leave," said High Councillor Kolminye.

The Master Chief stood in her office, back rigid, staring straight ahead. He had come here to tell her of his suspicions and to request that he be allowed to leave. It wasn't going so well.

"I would send you home if we could," she continued. "But we really do have no idea where to send you too. Your home doesn't seem to exist " not in this universe, and not in any other."

The Chief did not say a word. He hoped his silence would speak for him.

"We are still trying, making no mistake. It is just a lot harder with recent events." She began to count off her fingers. "Assassins, dead diplomats, a raid on the Institute"

The Chief looked down at her, his first movement since he entered the office. "Ma'am, it's my fault two of these things happened. My being here is a risk."

The Councillor rolled her eyes. "I fail to see how that is so," she said. "You're working off the assumption that they stole your technology. Ever since the _Dawn _was partially raised from the depths, it has been heavily guarded - no one would be able to get within a mile without being arrested."

"Then they are getting their information from someone on the inside. I know Covenant technology when I see it, Ma'am."

The Councillor sighed. "We are going to have to agree to disagree, then, Spartan. You have my word that we will continue to search for your way back home, but don't expect it to happen quickly. We must first quell this small insurrection. I'm sure that the technology you are so worried about is only some new form of hextech."

The Chief nodded his head, but was less than pleased with her answer. She believed that someone had the ability to invent technology thousands of years ahead of their time, and use it solely to overthrow her regime?

Unlikely.

If only she hadn't killed the first two assassins, then they would have some answers. Or at least be closer to them.

The Councillor turned her attention back to the papers on her desk, and the Chief turned away to leave the room, assuming he was dismissed.

"Master Chief?"

Chief turned back, wondering what she needed to say.

"I would greatly appreciate if you stayed on institute grounds for the next little while."

The Chief stared at the High Councillor, and she stared back. After a moment she gave him a chilly smile, and the Chief nodded in response before leaving the room.

He walked the halls, revelling in the silence. It was late at night, and everyone was sleeping off the events of today. The Summoners had managed to put out the fire eventually, and people had begun to collect bodies and move rubble. Although the fighting had happened in a small section of the city, it was the most popular and populated area, so work crews had begun their repairs immediately. Repairs were estimated to be done within the next few days.

His footsteps sounded odd to his ears. The silence seemed more menacing then it did a minute ago. The shadows pooled in the corners of the rooms, like evil specters slinking in the darkness.

A normal human might have become jumpy, overcome by stress, fear, and anxiety.

Chief wasn't a normal human. He knew he was just shaken by today's

revelations â€" he had brought war to Runeterra, no matter how much the High Councillor tried to deny it. They had taken his technology and turned it against him.

_This was why the UNSC implemented the Cole protocol, _he mused. The deletion of all archived data in case of capture, to avoid events like this. It was what he should have done, the moment he'd awoken aboard the _Dawn. _

He sighed, regretting everything.

He walked on, feeling the need for fresh air. His thoughts did not stop with his steady pace, though. He could only wonder how those automatons â€" or their maker â€" had gotten plasma tech. He was sure the _Forward Unto Dawn_'s database would not include such technology. It was possible they had found and reverse-engineered some plasma riflesâ€| but he doubted they had the expertise to do even that. And even then, it would be even harder to find a generator capable of creating plasma and directing it any sort of projectile.

_Maybe I shouldn't have deleted the Dawn's archives, _he thought. _Should have just blown up the entire Dawn._

He had done it before, destroying a ship to delete archived data. The last time he remembered doing it was the prowler above Reach.

Where Linda had been wounded.

Thoughts of all his Spartans began to race to his mind.

Despite ONI's best efforts to condition them and make them loners, they never really succeeded. It was as hard for the Spartans as it was for every other soldier. Nothing ever really prepared you for the pain of losing comrades.

Spartans just hid it better.

He left from a side entrance he had not been through before, finding that it opened into a spectacular park. There was a lake, with moonlight reflecting off the surface, benches made of ivory-coloured wood, tall grass that swayed gently in the night breeze, flowers of assorted shapes and colours. The stars shone brightly in the night sky, much brighter than on any UNSC worlds he had been on â€" no pollution, no fire, no plasma-caused smoke, and no Covenant battlecruisers to cover it up.

It was peaceful, a concept utterly foreign to the Chief.

He walked towards one of the benches, taking care not to trample and flowers beneath his armoured feet.

As he heard the bench, he realized someone was already sitting there. The person swayed slightly, as if allowing the breeze to carry them away.

To the Chief, it seemed extremely dangerous to be so distracted at night, alone. The Institute was full of assassins, warriors, and political rivals. He was sure they would break League rules to accomplish their goals.

But as the Chief took in his surroundings once more, he understood. It was beautiful, perfect " utterly serene. It was a place that seemed untouched by the rivalries that the League was created upon.

The Chief took a careful step back, deciding he should leave the person to what they were doing. He didn't want to be around anyone right now.

In a mirror image of so many nights ago, the person turned their head sharply, as if sensing Chief's presence.

The person's sharp, feminine features were illuminated by a stray ray of moonlight, some of it bouncing off of her silver hair. Her eyes widened. "Chief?"

The Chief sighed internally. He really had a knack for getting himself into these kinds of situations.

"Sorry, I was unawa-," he began, but cut himself off. He audibly sighed and tried again. "I didn't know it was you. I'm sorry for interrupting."

Riven gave him a hard look, biting her lip subtly, as if making a decision. Eventually, she scooted over to the side and patted the spot next to her.

The Chief took a look around, wondering if he should leave. He didn't exactly want to anymore, though.

"Come here," said Riven. She sounded impatient.

The Chief walked up to the bench and, after a moment of hesitation, sat down on it. It only creaked a tiny amount before settling, accepting his weight.

After another moment of hesitation, the Chief manually released his helmet and put it held it in his hands.

"What's wrong?" she asked, cutting right to the point.

"Nothing," replied the Chief. The breeze felt pleasant against his face. He ran a hand through his hair, noticing that it was longer than regulation cut. He'd need to fix that.

Riven raised an eyebrow and pressed her lips together.

For some reason, the Chief found the action infuriating. People weren't supposed to care how Spartans felt. It wasn't any of her business why he did things.

"Nothing at all," he said sharply through gritted teeth. "Does something have to be wrong to sit here?"

Riven blinked, and her face hardened. She turned away and stared at her feet.

A little belatedly, the Chief realized he said something wrong. He instantly regretted doing so; recently he just found it hard to balance his own emotions, let alone the emotions of others. He hadn't

meant to snap like that.

He searched for the right words to say. He knew if it were him, he would prefer the other person to leave him alone. He doubted that would fix the problem, though. He tried to think of what Cortana would say. It would probably have been along the lines of, "Chief, stop acting like an anti-social and see what's wrong with the girl."

"I'mâ€| sorry," said the Chief. "I didn't meanâ€| to snapâ€| like that." His voice sounded hollow in his ears. "Are youâ€| ok?"

Riven didn't look up, but her face became sad. "I justâ€| I'm fine."

Again, if he had been talking to himself, he would not have pressed the issue. Riven was definitely not like him, however, and he knew he needed to press the issue if he wanted to keep her as an ally. And because he still felt bad.

"Are youâ€| sure?" he asked again.

Riven bit her lip. "It's not something I tell people," she admitted. She looked torn between telling him and keeping it to herself.

"Well, I'm not going to be around for very long, so I would be unable tell anyone what you tell me," reasoned the Chief. It made sense to him. He wouldn't be in any position to spill her secrets.

"I come out here for fresh air because I have nightmares about my past. Some nights they're really bad, and I can't seem to get away from them."

The Chief just stared at her. He didn't understand why she was worried about others knowing she had nightmares.

Clearly she understood that, too. "My past wasn't exactlyâ€| clean," she clarified.

The Chief nodded slowly, staring out at the lake. He wasn't sure if Riven was done sharing, or if she was just trying to collect her thoughts.

His mental question was answered a minute later. "When I was youngâ€| really young, I was conscripted into the Noxian military. That's what they did to orphansâ€| and I proved to be really good at it. Fighting. I was the Noxian poster child. I truly believed in Noxian ideals. 'Only the strong survive'. They put me in charge of Fury Company, and we were nearly unstoppable. Thenâ€| the Ionian war started." she sighed. "It wasn't anything like we were told. We didn't fight at all; we just tidied up the mess that the Zaunite war machines left behind. And thenâ€|"

She began to shudder, and the Chief put a very reluctant hand on her shoulder to steady her. "And then one day we were surrounded. Most of my company was dead or dying before I could even tell them to form up. Someone started calling for re-enforcements. Thenâ€| the bombs started falling. The Zaun war machines launched chemicals into the battle, hitting us and the Ionians. They didn't care who was friend

and who was foe. It was a massacre. The chemicalsâ€¦ the things it did to us. Chewed through our armour like tissue paper, liquefying our flesh until it ran beneath our feet in pools, people choking on their own blood. The strong and the weak died together.

"So I ran, fled the battlefield. I was untouched physically, but I'm sure something in me died that day. I broke my sword to sever the ties between me and the monster that Noxus had become, and I began to wander. No matter how far I went, though, it always caught up to me. My enemies, my former alliesâ€¦" she trailed off.

With a start the Chief realized his hand was still on her shoulder, and he moved it off. He turned to stare out at the water.

"I came here, eventually," she continued, face now in her hands. "I thought I could make a difference, but I couldn't leave my past behind. Nightmares every night would haunt me. I almost left on several occasions. The people here helped me cope, butâ€¦ you know what the worst part is? Despite everything, I still love Noxus. I still believe in what it stood for. Sometimes that makes me feel like I'm tainted. "

The Chief swallowed a bit. She had just spilled everything to him, he knew. Her life story, bared for him to judge as he saw fit. Maybe she did it intentionally, or maybe it just spilled out.

"You survived," Chief said, staring at the unbroken surface of the lake. Riven lifted her face from her hands to look at him.

"You have purpose. You didn't die when everyone else did, and you did not leave." He tried to search for words that she could understand. He was pretty bad at this whole inspirational talk stuff. "It's your duty, to Noxus. A reckoning will come, one day. Here, you are part of a place where the best unite for peace. You can make a difference here."

She stared at him for a few more seconds, and he knew his attempt at a speech had failed. "That's a nice thought," she said, burying her face in her hands once again. "But untrue. I have no idea how to work with these people. I was trained from so young for war that I've forgotten what peace really is. Someone like me can't make any difference at all."

The Chief swallowed harshly. He knew what he wanted to say. Unfortunately, saying it was forbidden from the highest authority of the Office of Naval Intelligence. A revelation like it could cause anarchy within the UNSC.

But it was also the right thing to say at this moment. And it wasn't like Riven would be able to tell the whole UNSC, anyways, on account of the whole inter-dimensional thing. It couldn't pose that much of a risk.

"Spartan â€" 117." He said. "I'm the 117 test subject out of 150 chosen for the Spartan II super-soldier program. I was taken from my home â€" which I don't remember at all â€" to a training base on the planet Reach, because I was genetically superior to others. I was six."

Riven stopped and listened intently. The Master Chief's voice had

taken on a tone she had never heard before â€" soft, low, painful.

"We trained hard. We went through live-fire exercises when I was eight. We got our augmentations when I was twelve. Ceramic bone implants, increased muscle density, electric nervous systemâ€" thirty-three of us died. Twelve of us were critically injured. Thirty of us survived."

Riven licked her lips absent-mindedly. That was less than fifty percent of the total subjects that survived. She didn't think she would have volunteered for anything with odds that low.

"We became the best. I was given Cortana, my AI and best friend, and I was put in charge, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Spartans. We were a close-knit group, so we could not socialize well with non-Spartans. It was just us.

"Then the Covenant came, and everything changed. Spartans became the last and only line of defense on many worlds. No matter how many battles we won, though, the Covenant kept advancing. In the end, even the Spartans proved inadequate and the majority of us died, the rest missing. Alone, I held off them off, time and time again. I should have died a dozen times over, but it never happened. Even when I made the ultimate sacrifice for victory, getting myself trapped in the void between worlds, I survived. Even when Cortana died."

He paused, swallowing to ease his aching throat. He was still unused to talking for extended periods of time.

"I have my duty to protect the Human race. That's why I'm still alive. Otherwise, what use does a universe at peace have for a hyper-lethal supersoldier?"

Riven stared at the Chief with impossibly wide eyes. The Chief just stared out at the lake for a little while longer, and then turned his attention to his helmet. He ran his fingers over the various scars, dents and burns that adorned it. Reighlen had offered to patch it up, but the Chief had refused. In a way, each piece of battle-damage reminded him of the cost for victory. One day it would be repaired, but not yet.

Riven didn't say anything, placing a hand on his arm. She nodded to herself, understanding what the Chief was trying to tell her.

The Chief, for his part, kept his attention on the moonlit sky. He remembered a long time ago wondering if there were others looking down at him, in the same way he was looking up at them, before the aliens had shown up. And despite the horrors of the human-Covenant war, the incredible loss of human life, and the extinction of all his Spartans, he still had that same thought as he gazed up.

Tainted indeed.

The Master Chief and Riven sat there for the rest of the night, until the stars went out.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere, early morning

"Sir, I apologize for my failure."

Marin was standing, again, in his employer's office, noting the various new mechanical parts that adorned it.

"Nonsense," his employer said with a flourish of his hand.
"Everything went exceedingly well. I have all the data I need to enhance my mechs."

He lightly touched an indent on the small device in front of him, and a blue light shined upwards. A few more button presses later and a picture showed up: a detailed hologram of the new and improved mech.

It looked bulked out: additional armour, sturdier frame, enhanced weapon systems, new targeting systems, improved motors. It looked deadly in all respects.

Marin smiled, but remembered that the man could not see his expression, and so he nodded appreciatively.

That still didn't mean he wasn't annoyed with "or absolved of- his failure. That was twice now. He had been so sure that his trap would work"

The Employer smiled suddenly, and it was enough to interrupt Marin's thoughts. "Soon," he said, turning off the projector and spinning his chair around. "Soon."

* * *

><p>Alrighty. Finally I get to the chapter in which the Chief opens up...

So, technically the Cole Protocol is not the deletion of all archived data, but I took some liberties to make this easier for myself. Hopefully that isn't too much of a problem for you guys.

**Eh... i would ask you guys to review since this is my first story, but asking never actually works, does it?*

Instead I will say: See you next time on _Dawn_

15. Chapter 15

Chapter 15: Oh, so that's how it is.

There really wasn't anything for the Master Chief to do on league grounds.

He had listened to what the High Councillor had ordered and hadn't left the grounds for the past three days. Unfortunately, that meant there was very little to do. More boring still, the Institute had cut down on daily league games because so many Summoners were busy with recent events, so he couldn't even fight on the rift.

So the Chief spent his time between wandering around and training in

the gym so he could try and get back to his peak physical condition. Even though his muscle mass had replenished significantly, it wasn't yet back to what it should be, which he attributed to ice crystals in the muscles.

It was while wandering that the Chief found the stables. It was located just outside the main area of the League, just like the bar, but on the opposite side. He had debated going inside " after all, going into a UNSC vehicle bay was off limits to unauthorized personnel. He had decided to go in anyways, partly because the doors were unlocked and partly because he thought it was best to inspect the grounds more thoroughly.

On the inside it was simply made of wood, some of which were inlaid with small patterns. There was hay on the floor and many stalls lined up on either side, each one filled with horses of all different colours.

That made the Chief interested. Horses were something he had studied, learned about " but never seen. It was hard to see wildlife on planets in their death throes, and none had been brought to Reach by colonists.

He walked between the animals, noting their behaviours when he came close. A few craned their necks out, possibly hoping that he had some treat for them, but they promptly recoiled when their noses came into contact with his active energy shields.

The Chief stood there for a little while, and the horses eventually began to ignore his presence.

The Chief gazed around the room, noting the little details about it. There were several saddles lined up in pegs along the far wall, ranging from plain brown ones to ones inlaid with silver, gold and ebony.

He heard a soft whinny come from his left, and turned to see two white horses extending their necks out at him, unafraid of the energy shielding that had deterred their comrades. They both shared the same stall, and each one was the purest of whites.

Footsteps outside the building.

The Chief turned towards the door, hand by his side, ready to draw his magnum.

Tryndamere walked in with a swagger, but that couldn't hide the hint of nervousness in his step. He held a bag of some sort of grain in one hand, and he began to approach the Chief.

Chief stepped back, giving himself some space should he need to fight.

Fighting didn't seem to be on Tryndamere's mind, however, as he walked up to the horses and opened the bag, allowing them to munch on the food inside.

The two of them stood there in tense silence.

"These horses are ours, Ashe and me. While the Summoners could easily

transport us, we like riding more," Tryndamere began. He paused, as if pondering something. "About the other dayâ€¦ I'mâ€¦ real sorry about that." He coughed into his free hand and a half grimace appeared on his face. "I was drinking a lot, andâ€¦ ahâ€¦ yeah."

The Chief didn't say anything, though he did wonder why Tryndamere was having trouble articulating. Could it be from a hangover?

Tryndamere continued on, "I don't usually go bezerk off the battlefield, but sometimesâ€¦ I don't actually mean it. I didn't mean to hit my wife, orâ€¦ tryâ€¦ and hit you."

Chief loosened his pose somewhat, relaxing now that he knew Tryndamere wasn't here to pick a fight. He nodded, and that seemed to make the King of the Freljord happierâ€¦ or relieved.

"Y'know, you hit hard," he said, rubbing his chin. "I think we could be friends."

He stuck out his hand, and the Chief reluctantly accepted it. While he still wasn't happy with the King, and especially didn't want to be his friend, it would be far easier to have him as an ally than as an enemy. It would be nice to limit the number of political rivals he made.

Tryndamere smiled wide. "Soâ€¦. You wanna go for a drink?"

"No," was the Spartans response.

* * *

><p>The Chief walked away from the stable, heading back into the Institute. He walked through the main entrance, intending to go to the library. There were many books on the history of Valoran there, and the Chief read through them when he could so as to better understand the land he was trapped in. Most interesting was the 'runewars' that were mention, but the books rarely went into detail about it.<p>

Of course, he couldn't actually make it there without being stopped by someone else.

It was the Champion from the other day, the one wearing the ornate, delicate red armour which seemed to the Chief far too fragile to take a direct hit.

"Master Chief?" The woman asked, and the Chief reluctantly nodded. No matter how much he tried not to socialize, it seemed to happen anyways.

The woman seemed aloof, a little haughty even; but it didn't fit her young features.

"I wanted to thank you for your assistance the other day. You are quite the combatant."

"It's my duty," Chief responded.

The woman made no effort to move. She gazed over the Spartan who,

despite being two steps lower than her, matched her height.

"How are you settling in?" she asked, clearly attempting to make some small talk.

The Chief shrugged, the extent of his small-talk know-how.

Irelia gave a small smile and nodded. "It was hard for me to get used to the place too. Some of us still haven't. Although, I do have to say Riven's been perkier in the last couple days than she's ever been in this place." She gave the Chief a knowing look.

"Must have had a good game," he said with a shrug.

Irelia shook her head. She stopped talking for a minute, and the Chief assumed that was his queue to leave.

"You really should visit Ionia, my home country, some time," The woman continued, forcing the Chief to stay a bit longer. "It is a beautiful place, and I believe you would find insight there."

The Chief wondered what she meant by 'insight'. It could be a turn of phrase, or it could mean something more. Chief mentally scoffed at himself right after thinking that. All this magic stuff was really making him second-guess things now. He wasn't so sure that was a good thing for him.

"I'd rather stay on League grounds," the Spartan said. "In case I'm needed." He didn't bother elaborating on the fact that he wanted to be as close as possible when "if" they found him a way back home.

Irelia shrugged instead this time. "Consider it, please. Anyways, I shall take my leave now, since I see you are impatient to get moving again."

The Chief watched her go, wondering if it was really that obvious that he wanted to get moving. As soon as she cleared the steps, the Chief resumed his climb.

* * *

><p>He spent part of the day in the library, as were his intentions, but left a bit early. He went to the cafeteria, grabbed some food, and retreated back to his room.<p>

As he walked down the hall, he noticed the large box in front of his door. It was completely plain except for the _caution _labeled across the front.

The Chief opened the door to his room and carefully pushed the box inside. He set his food down on the counter, and knelt beside the box.

He scanned the container with his helmet, but failed to pick up any known bomb residues. It didn't have any thermal emissions, either, but that didn't mean something potentially dangerous could be inside.

So he waited.

He stared at the box until he finished eating with his armour on. He set his plate down, and began to open the box.

The box was sturdy, sealed well enough to deter most thieves. But for a Spartan, it was as easy as tugging on the lid and watching all the screws pop off.

The contents made him smile.

It was a weapons shipment, but of the best kind: power weapons.

There were a couple of DMRs, but there was also a rocket launcher, a sniper rifle, and two shotguns. There was ammo stacked on the bottom, and loose shotgun shells rolled around.

The Master Chief grabbed one of the shotguns, inserted a shell, and pumped it, hearing the satisfying click as the round was chambered.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

The stench of blood was thick in the air.

Marin sat there, supervising the professors at each of their surgical tables. On each one lay a person, opened up in some matter.

Marin had been against this part " there were no need for enhanced humans when they had automatons. That eliminated the point of having a mechanized army. Of course, his opinion didn't really matter, and he had been assured no civilians had been chosen for the operation.

Really, he couldn't do anything except smile and nod. His contract parameters did not let him.

He checked the charge on his rifle, having learned from before that the power tended to drain out while idle.

95%

He was there to supervise, and in case something went wrong with one of the test subjects, eliminate them.

A new wave of scientists entered the room, each carrying a blue crystal orb. They lined up in front of each of the tables, and began to do something he did not want to see.

At the back of the room the group of sorcerers- which had seemed so out of place before " began to chant. Magic began to swirl around the tables in tangible lines, wrapping themselves around the patients.

The purple hextech arms magically suspended above the patients descended on a magic word from their operators.

94%

The screaming began again.

* * *

><p>Sorry for the short chapter. My history teacher decided to drop an essay on me yesterday due monday, and this chapter was only half-finished at the time, so I rushed it out.

Anyways... the next update will probably also include that skill set I've been working on for the Chief. Dunno how that'll turn out.

**As always, review (If asking actually works) and I hope you enjoyed the chapter. Hopefully I'll see you next time...?*

16. Chapter 16

Chapter 16 " The Gun Show

* * *

><p>Two weeks after the raid on the institute

****THE MASTER CHIEF HAS SLAIN RYZE****

The announcers accented voice reverberated across the fields of justice. The Master Chief whom she had just mentioned was taking cover in a bush just by the middle lane, right beside the rapidly fading body of the Ryze he had just killed.

Another person slide into the bush beside him, holding his blade low by his side.

"You gotta save some kills for us too, you know," Yasuo said, a playful smile on his face.

"Tell that to my Summoner," Chief replied, reloading his assault rifle slowly. He gazed across the lane, seeing a large crocodilian man step out of the opposite bush, just as a matins-like creature appeared from the ruins of the Chief's mid lane tower.

"How 'bout I take 'Zix and you take care of Renekton?" Yasuo asked, eyeing the route he would take.

The Chief grunted his assent. It really didn't matter to him what enemy he fought, so long as his team won in the end.

Yasuo charged out of the bush, deciding to abandon any form of tactical planning. The Chief was forced to charge out also, lest his adversary turn Yasuo's fight into a 2v1.

Renekton roared as he saw the Spartan run towards him, and dashed forwards to meet him.

The Chief rolled to the left, igniting a plasma grenade and sticking it to Renekton's belly. The Chief then dove away as the grenade detonated.

Unfortunate for the Chief, Renekton was tanky enough to shrug off the worst of the blast and kept on coming. He fired his rifle in full auto, each shot tearing chunks of blue light out of Renekton's body, but with other visible effect.

The Butcher swung his blade around, the blow hitting the Chief and severely damaging his shields. It then followed up with two more slashes, but they were clumsy and easy to avoid.

The Chief drew his magnum with his off hand and fired it as best he could into Renekton's face, but the crocodile seemed to relish the pain more than anything else. Renekton lashed out again, hitting the Chief and bringing down his shields completely.

A red line appeared behind the Butcher, and he followed it to its target: Yasuo.

The Chief glanced in the direction it was coming from, but all he could see in the distance was a purple top hat.

Renekton came at him again, swinging his blade, but this time the Chief grabbed onto it and let it carry him around the massive reptile's body. He landed on the other side of the beast, and it looked around in confusion for a few seconds " all the opportunity the Spartan needed.

He dropped his rifle and magnum and brought out the 99-S5 anti-materiel sniper rifle that he had been carrying on his back. He got into his stance, quickly taking aim at the target that was just out of his line of sight. He aimed the rifle scope just above where he assumed the target's head was, allowing for bullet drop.

He fired once, the round tearing through the air and causing a massive booming noise. Due to its proximity to Renekton, it caused the beast to roar in pain " or anger.

But the Spartan didn't just fire once. The rifle carried four of the 57 calibre rounds, and he fired all of them, his prodigious strength allowing him to keep the rifle level. Even so, it rocked his body back. While he considered it was overkill to empty the clip, it was better to be safe than sorry.

The red line faded just as the Announcer called out another of his kills.

****THE MASTER CHIEF HAS SLAIN CAITLYN.****

The Chief reloaded just as a large shadow crossed over him. He spun around, sniper aimed at the center of the creatures mass, but the glowing blade swung faster and ripped into his body, rooting him to the spot. The beast then swung the blade around in an unstoppable arc, and everything went black.

****RENEKTON HAS SLAIN THE MASTER CHIEF**.**

* * *

><p>"It was a good game," Rengar growled, rolling his shoulders around to loosen the muscles.<p>

The team was still on the summoning platform, the game having just ended. It was a close one, but in the end the Chief's team lost it. The Chief found that he really didn't care all that much about the loss. It had been fun, and winning too many times would just bring attention to him. He really wanted to limit the amount of spotlight time he had in this place.

"Yeah," Yasuo chimed in, also stretching out his muscles. Apparently the whole team's muscles were sore after so long a game. "Still wanted to win, though."

Everybody stood in silence for a moment.

"Soâ€|" Yasuo began, trying to break the silence. "Does anyone want to go eat something?"

"The hunt awaits," Rengar said, and began to leave. The other two champions â€" Malphite and Twitch â€" also declined, walking the opposite way.

"Ehâ€|" Yasuo mumbled. "Guess it's just you and me, then, big guy."

"No," the Chief said, also turning away to leave. He wanted to get back to the training room to train.

"Whaaa? No way. I 'aint getting left alone." Yasuo grabbed the Spartan by the arm comically and began to pull him â€" or attempt to â€" to the cafeteria.

The Chief could have just shrugged and shaken him off with ease, but decided against it. It's not like his other 'business' was more pressing.

* * *

><p>"And so I said, 'no, you're dead!" Yasuo began to laugh loudly, causing some of the other champions â€" some of which clearly had hangovers â€" to turn their heads towards the pair in annoyance.

The Chief just tilted his head, confused at why the line was funny.

Yasuo laughed for a little bit more than wiped a tear from his eye. "Maybe you had to be thereâ€| Anyways, moral of the story is: don't touch the fruit smoothies."

Chief blinked. "Thatâ€| had no relevance to the story. At all."

Yasuo shrugged, draining the last bit of his unknown alcoholic beverage.. "Just checkin' if you were listening."

The Chief shook his head, unamused. Now that he was actually here, spending time with Yasuo, he was sure his other 'business' was more important.

"I guess I'm just sayin' that is sucks wandering around alone. But I

guess you already know that, seeing as how you're a dimensional castaway," said the wanderer.

The Chief stared at Yasuo, then looked out the window they were sitting beside. While he had come to terms with his separation from the United Nations Space Command, he still wasn't comfortable with it. It was odd to think about what might be going on on the other side. Was humanity winning, or had they won? Had they already been eliminated by the Covenant? Had their sacrifice even made a difference?

It was something he didn't know, and that didn't settle well with him.

"Soâ€¦" Yasuo's voice broke the Chief's thoughts. "Got any good stories?"

The Chief looked back at him and said, "no."

"C'mon. You're a space warrior fromâ€¦ space. How can you NOT have good stories?"

"â€¦No?"

Yasuo raised a single eyebrow and stared at the Chief hard.

The Chief sighed. "There was one timeâ€¦"

And so the Chief told the story of the assault on Cairo station. Chief wasn't the best story teller, so the story was more technical than riveting, but it was still interesting for the Wanderer. The Chief had to skip over some parts that revealed too much information, and he had to explain a lot of the things involved in the attack. It had been especially hard describing a Covenant destroyer. Of course, despite the Chief downplaying the part with the bomb, it still had Yasuo whistling. Even the Chief had to admit to himself that it was kind of epic.

Kind of.

As soon as he finished the story he went silent. He had tried to make it as brief as possible, but it still took quite a while.

Yasuo shook his head. "That was a hell of a story, Chief. Kinda makes me want to have been there just to see their faces."

"It _was _a good story," said a voice.

The woman stepped into view, her just being out of visible range of the pair. That didn't mean the Spartan hadn't detected her before. He just knew he wouldn't have been able to take action even if he wanted to, so he had just let her be.

"Oh, Ahri," Yasuo said, looking somewhat content. "How long've you been here?"

The fox woman shrugged playfully.

"Soâ€¦ I was wondering if you two boys wanted to take a girl out for a day on the town. Especially you, space warrior." Ahri finished her

sentence with a wink and a bite of the lip.

Yasuo nodded eagerly and the Chief flat out said no.

The Ronin stared at the Spartan. "What? You don't wanna go?"

The Chief shook his head. He was tolerant of all the people here, but mainly because the Institute demanded it was so. He still viewed everyone as a threat, but none more so than the abhumans and non-humans. The Human-Covenant war hadn't made it easy for him to trust things that didn't look perfectly human.

Ahri gave a sad pout as the Chief stood up. Yasuo just shook his head.

The Chief passed his unopened bottle to the pair and left the room.

* * *

><p>The Chief knew something was wrong the instant he walked into his room.<p>

Nothing looked different, and his motion sensor detected nothing. Even the trained eye would have found nothing out of place. The Chief's eye, however, was several leagues beyond 'trained'. He noted instantly the slight trail of dust on the floor, the ever so slight smear on the desk, the M6B magazine that was a centimeter out of position.

He snapped up his magnum to the left, where the unknown trespasser was sitting.

She looked faintly surprised, because to her the Chief had walked in and instantly pointed a deadly weapon in her direction. Even for someone exceptionally gifted that shouldn't be possible.

The Chief didn't fire. He knew he couldn't until she attacked first. So he just stood there, weapon aimed.

The woman stood up, and raised her arms away from her body. "No need to be so fast," she said with a smirk.

The Chief did not lower the weapon. He had made a point to study each person most likely of causing harm, and this was one of them. Lowering his guard could prove potentially fatal â€" even though he was sure he could hold his own.

"Sinister Blade," he said. He then tilted his head in question.

Katarina shrugged, the motion sending her various daggers rippling. "I was justâ€| looking around." She finished with a sly smile.

The Chief didn't move for a full minute. He then lowered the gun, but left it upholstered. He jerked his thumb towards the door and said, "out."

While some may have taken more drastic action against an intruder, especially an assassin, the Chief didn't want to. It would cause a

whole host of problems the Chief was more than eager to avoid.

The Noxian assassin was still smiling as she moved towards the door. Just before she could touch it, however, the Chief's hand snapped out and grabbed her arm.

She turned around, eyes flashing. Her other hand had reached for a dagger, but the Chief's magnum was already at her head, unwavering.

She stared at him. "_No one touches me,_" she growled out.

"No one steals from me," the Chief responded with. He let her go and moved away, his hand clutching the leaf of paper she had tried to take away. A quick glance at it confirmed it was a detailed diagram of his other magnum.

The woman laughed this time, a real, full throated laugh of genuine amusement. The Chief wasn't so sure why she did so, but he could only speculate that it was because he had managed to see through her far easier than she expected.

Or maybe power armour was just funny.

Katarina disappeared in a flash of light, and the Master Chief was left aiming his pistol at thin air.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

Marin sat on the metal walkway that hung high above the room, his feet dangling into the empty space below him.

Down on the floor of the room were the massive assemblies that his employer had given him permission to view.

Apparently he was in higher graces, now.

The magic in the room was palpable. It seemed as solid as the walls or the ceiling or the metal grating of the floor. Marin could only imagine the amount of sorcery being put into the sheets of metal below.

From what he could tell, each sheet of the machine's hull was being magically blessed before being sealed to the superstructure of the thing. In its center was a massive crystal, pulsing red like a heart.

Marin had seen energy crystals before, and these ones did not seem normal at all.

Stranger still, he was sure he had seen runes being attached to the massive rotary weapon of the machine. He had believed that all runes had been confiscated or destroyed by the Institute of War " which begged the question of how they were here.

A massive booming noise shook him out of his thoughts.

Below him one of the farther vehicles " the ones closer to being finished "was moving. One of its heavily armoured legs rose up and

down again, slightly moving it forwards and causing the noise to repeat itself.

Even though Marin was high up above the room, the large size of the thing was still evident.

He tried to imagine a way that soldiers with bows and spears would fight and kill something of this magnitude.

He failed.

* * *

><p>Right after I hand in my History essay I get a calculus essay. I didn't even know they had those... so as a result, another short chapter. I hate making excuses, but it seems to be sad face week for me.

****Hopefully the skillset makes up for it, and I'll try and make the next chapter longer.****

****Um... Review if you guys feel like it, and I hope you enjoyed the relatively short chapter.****

****C ya.****

17. Stats

****RIGHT. So here's that skill set I've been working on for some undetermined amount of time. ****

****I imagine the Chief as close range adc something like lucian, wayne or ugot, but with with abilities that do damage instead of provide utility.****

****so here we go. I have some notes attached to each ability to help explain what I envisioned. ****

* * *

><p>John-117

****The Master Chief****

****Statistics****

****Health:** 400 (+80)**

****Health regen:**5.2(+0.5)**

****Mana:**200(+50)**

****Mana Regen:**6(+0.8)**

****Range:**505**

****Attack Damage:**50(+2.85)**

****Attack Seed:**0.648 (+3%)**

****Armour:**20(+3.5)**

****Magic rs:**30**

****Movement Speed:**340**

****PASSIVE -** Energy Shielding:** Grants a shield which absorbs 40/80/120 + 50% of AD. MAX: 500 refreshes when out of combat for 10 seconds.

****Q-:** Magnum Salvo:** RANGE-600 COST- 60/65/70/75/80 COOLDOWN - 10/9/8/7/6

****ACTIVE -** The Master Chief empties his Magnums magazine in a 25 degree cone, filling the area with a hail of bullets, dealing damage to all enemies in the area. Enemies within half range of the Chief (300) will take 50% additional damage.**

PHYSICAL DAMAGE - 40/70/90/100/120 (+ 75% of bonus AD)(+50% of bonus AP)

****(Like Darius Q, damage applies instantly, but the animation takes longer.)****

****W-:** Shield Burst:** RANGE-550 COST-none
COOLDOWN-25/23/21/19/17

****ACTIVE -** The Master Chief manually detonates his Energy Shielding, dealing damage to nearby enemies and slowing them, while granting the Chief a temporary speed boost. The Shields systems then take longer than usual to recharge.**

MAGIC DAMAGE - Equal to the amount of the Chief's current shield.
(+25% of bonus AP)

SPEED SLOW - 20%/25%/30%/35%/40%

MOVEMENT SPEED GAIN - 15%/20%/25%/30%/35%

Shields temporarily take 5 seconds longer to recharge after using this ability

****(I thought it would be cool if the Chief could do a massive static burst with his shields, since Cortana did it in one of the novels to dislodge a flood parasite. I envision it would be used as an escape mechanism or a way to duel enemy adc's.)****

****E-:** Plasma Grenade:** RANGE-625 COST-50/55/60/65/70
COOLDOWN-10/9.5/9/8.5/8 seconds PROJECTILE SPEED-1450

****ACTIVE-** The Master Chief throws a plasma grenade to the target location, detonating in a 140-radius area after 0.75 seconds. If the center of the target area is an enemy champion, the grenade will instead stick to them, following them for 0.75 seconds before detonating. The stuck unit will take 25% additional damage, but the grenade will not detonate in a radius.**

PHYSICAL DAMAGE - 50/100/150/200/250 (+65% of bonus AD)(+50% of bonus AP)

(Only sticks to targets it hits dead on. I took off the blast radius from when it sticks because then it would just be Zilean bomb.)

R-: Spartan Lazer: RANGE-1100 COST-100 Cooldown-90/70/60
PROJECTILE SPEED-Instant

ACTIVE- The Chief charges up the lazer for 0.5 seconds, firing in a straight line, damaging the first enemy champion it hits and exploding in a 250 radius, rooting all targets hit. Enemies caught in the blast radius will take 50% damage. If it does not hit an enemy, it will explode upon reaching the end of its path.

PHYSICAL DAMAGE - 150/200/250 (+50% of bonus AD)(+50% of Bonus AP)

ADDITIONAL DAMAGE - Deals 5%/6.5%/8% of the targets max health over 3 seconds

ROOT DURATION - .50/.75/1 second(s)

(Same width as Ezreal Q)

(Fires like Lux lazer, including the charge-up time and the little red line. However, while Charging up, the Chief can move around the skillshot/red line in the same way as Vel'Koz ult. However, he has a 25% reduced turn rate. I gave it a root because i Imagined it would be more for catching people and forcing fights than to kill. There's too many ultimate executions on ADC's in League. and the burn damage... Well, its a lazer.)

* * *

><p>Okay, tell me what you guys think. I've never done this before, so try and... be nice? I dunno, just say what you guys feel about this.

18. Chapter 17

Chapter 17 - Field Expedient

"Wait, do you smell that?"

Jayce stood in the idle of the hallway, sniffing, with the Master Chief by his side.

The Chief had been going through his day the usual way: training with minimal contact with other living beings, but Jayce had decided to spend some time with him and was currently dragging him all around the League area.

The Defender turned around, still waiting for a response.

The Chief shrugged, saying "Yes." In truth, he had smelled something being baked a long time ago, but hadn't mentioned it as it wasn't all that relevant.

Jayce just stood there, sniffing. "This way!" he declared in a heroic

voice, and began to march down the hallway with his arms swinging by his side like he was at some great triumph.

The Chief just followed him with an internal sigh, confused at how these sorts of things always happened to him. It seemed like more he tried to ignore people, the more people tried to talk to him.

The hallways were fairly busy at this time of day. Champion, aides and even a few robed Summoners were traversing them to get to the places they wanted to be.

All in all, there were way too many people here for the Chief. Every one of them could be a potential hostile, and he was without his armour. He was still sure he could beat anyone that came at him, but it wasn't a very reassuring feeling.

Jayce stopped in front of a door, sniffing. "Here!" he declared, and rapped on the door three times.

The door itself was a plain red colour, chipping in some places and dented in others. There was a picture of what looked like a winged horse on it, but it was faded and hard to make out.

The door opened, revealing a man wearing a steel helmet and an apron.

"Pantheon!" Jayce cried out quickly pushed passed him into the room.

Pantheon just stood there, but it was impossible to read his face due to his helmet.

"Okay." Pantheon looked to the Chief, who stood just a little away from the door. "Why don't you come in too? We can all bake together!"

The Chief blinked, taking in the helmet-and-apron combo. "You bake?"

Pantheon nodded eagerly. "I've always wanted to be a baker!"

The Chief stared for a few seconds, then allowed himself to be led inside by the rakkorian.

The room smelled very strongly of flour. Jayce was already inside the small kitchen area, munching on something.

"You k'now, panth, these 'r 'eally good," he said, his mouth full of whatever he was eating.

"I am very glad you like them!" Panthon exclaimed, grabbing a massive bag of flour from under the table and carrying it to the kitchen counter, where large bowl was waiting.

The Chief stood there, watching Pantheon attempt to bake while Jayce ate all of the finished goods.

While the food did indeed smell good, the Chief wasn't sure how Pantheon managed to do that. The way he baked was odd, to say the least. While the Chief wasn't an expert baker in fact, he didn't

know the first thing about baking â€" he was fairly certain you didn't put whole eggs into a mountain of flour and mix it together with a bloody spear tip.

The Artisan ofâ€| bakery turned his head to look at the Chief. "Hey, come over and you can help roll the dough into shapes!"

The Chief shook his head, slowly edging towards the door.

Panthon sucked under the counter as he looked for something, providing the Chief with the perfect opportunity.

"We have star shaped cookie-cutters, and present shaped ones! Which one do you waâ€|"

Pantheon looked around the room, failing to see the Spartan. "Chief? Hey, where'd you go?"

Jayce shrugged, another three cookies in his hand. "More for me."

* * *

><p>The Chief walked away from Pantheon's room, trying to brush the accumulated flour out of his shirt.<p>

"â€|Why do you smell like a bakery?"

The Chief froze. "There was anâ€| incident with a bag of flour," he began, turning around.

Riven stood just behind him, finger on her lip in a pensive pose.

"You should probably get out of those clothes," she said. "Do you have anything else to wear?"

Chief nodded. "My armour," he said.

Riven sighed. "You can't alwa- fine, keep those on." She walked past the Chief. "Come on."

The Chief didn't move. "Where?"

Riven stopped walking. "The bar. We can watch League matches on the big television they have."

The Chief frowned. "Watchâ€|League matches?"

* * *

><p>"Wow, what scrubs," Gragas said.<p>

The Chief sat at the bar beside Riven, both of them staring at the large screen above them. The purple team was currently scattered around the jungle, while the blue side was pushing hard in a speartip towards purple's blue.

"They don't seem to know what they're doing," Riven said. She munched on a few of the fried something-or-others that she had purchased. Most of the other people in the bar murmured their agreement, their

eyes fixated on the screen.

The Chief said, "If Malzahar stay out of position like that, the rest of his team is going to leave him behind and he will be caught out."

The earned mostly grunts from the patrons that could hear him.

"Garen's fed, he can fight off 'nyone that catches Malz out," a Summoners aide said.

Chief shook his head. "He can't fight them off if he's locked down."

That earned a snort from the Summoners aide.

The Chief shook his head again and, not twenty seconds later, Malz gets caught out by blue team. Garen rushed to save him but is rooted down by Morgana and both blue team members are killed by purple.

Everybody in the bar gasped aloud. The Chief didn't do anything, content with the knowledge that he was correct. At least all that time in cryo hadn't messed up his ability to read tactical situations.

"â€|I should have placed that bet," Riven cursed. She shook her head in apparent sadness.

The Chief shrugged.

"Ah well," Riven said. She grabbed a fistful of her fired snack and made to get up. "Let's go. I don't really want to watch the rest."

The Master Chief got up a little more hesitantly. "Where?"

She shrugged. "I dunno. I'm sure we can find something to do around here."

* * *

><p>Marin wasn't too sure how much quiet constituted ominous silence, but he was sure the camp right now would be eligible for the latter.<p>

He had followed his target to this Demacian camp, the base of his operations.

He stalked through the tents, silent as a shadow. If anyone saw him at that moment, they would be hard pressed to separate him from the darkness that clung to him.

The commander's tent was dark; the person inside having fallen asleep during the hours Marin had watched the camp from afar.

Marin glanced around, confirming that he hadn't been followed. He slipped inside the tent with barely a whisper.

Marin searched the room with his eyes: the Commander was in his bed. He padded over to it, his energy rifle held at the ready.

Marin froze. It was just a moment, more of a feeling than anything else that made Marin dodge back as the blade lashed out from the bed.

The Commander rose up from his hiding place, fully armed armoured. The Demacian roared a challenge and ran at Marin with his blade held low, ready to stab.

Marin was unable to bring his rifle to bear at such confined quarters, so all he could do was doge back again, and once more as the Demacian swung.

The Commander roared again, and Marin was forced to back out of the tent.

A mistake, the first Marin had committed in a while.

The Demacian soldiers which should have been groggy with sleep were all armoured and armed, and were arrayed in a circle around the tent.

Marin snickered as he stared at the spear-wielding soldiers. It would be impossible to fight a ring of polearms.

He had actually been tricked. The novelty of such a thing turned his snicker into an all-out laughing fit. He actually had to drop his rifle to hold his side because he was laughing so hard.

"Laugh while you can," the Commander said. "You'll be dead in a few moments."

Marin's breath came in ragged gasps. If only his face wasn't covered, then he could wipe away the tears fogging up his vision. Instead of wiping his face, he gripped his falchion out of its leg sheath and raised it.

The Demacian commander shook his head. "Such is the fate of all assassin scum, to be cut down like dogs."

Marin dropped the blade and shook his head. "I don't think so."

The Demacian soldiers all took a step forward, closing the ring of spears. The Demacian commander smiled. "Face it, you have been outsmarted. You have failed."

Marin cocked his head. "Have I?"

It was then that the charges Marin had seeded across the camp detonated.

They went off in stages, each one placed to cause maximum destruction. The soldiers around Marin began to scatter as the charges sent spirals of eldritch flame into them, burning their armour right off and sloughing the flesh from their bones.

The sky lit up, and Marin revelled in the destruction. He had always personally hated subtle missions; he preferred the rush of combat,

the thrill of a charge, the warmth of blood and the satisfaction of enemies dropping in droves.

A roar. The Commander and his remaining soldiers hurled themselves at Marin.

Marin brought his foot down on the fallen falchion, the force bringing it up into the air. Marin snapped his foot back out and lashed out at the still rising blade, sending it point first into the face of the Demacian commander.

The momentum of the other charging soldiers died down as they saw their leader fall. Marin allowed himself to feel a moment of satisfaction at the theater of the kill; thought hadn't needed to make it so theatrical, it had been a good way to refresh his skills. And it had been fun.

The soldiers looked at each other uncertainly. Marin scooped up his fallen rifle and began to snap shots off, each quick beam of light cracking through the air and leaving a headless corpse behind it.

Soon, there was no one left alive on the field. Whoever Marin hadn't slain was killed by the raging inferno around him.

Marin sighed as he wrenched his blade out of the Commander.

"Bastard. Now I'm going to have to clean my blade again."

* * *

><p>"I saw it, sir, I swear I did. It came in the night, and we were all prepared for itâ€| but it didn't matter in the end. It wasn't human, sir, I'm sure of it. The way it killedâ€| The only thing I don't understand, sirs, is why Noxus would consort with Daemons." â€" Keryan Smalas, Seargent, 104 battalion, only surviving member of the attack on the camp of Commander Irius 'Peacemaker' Varrak

* * *

><p>Geez... Had to stay awake all of last night to finish the calculus essay and write this chapter. The next one will be longer, I promise. I just didn't want to not upload, and I thought a small chapter would be better than no chapter.

Anyways, the first little bit of this chapter was just for comic relief, like it or hate it, it was meant to be stupid. I just couldn't write a serious chapter at 3 in the morning.

So... yeah. See you guys next time, unless you find something better to read.

19. Chapter 19

Chapter 18 â€" Shining Armour

Malphite was a very strong champion. He was considered one of the

strongest of them, and rightly so. He is a creature of stone, a being that does not feel exhaustion or strain. It can exert its strength for a long time, forever if need be, and it will never give up until its opponent is crushed to a dust finer than that which coats its own stony exterior.

But despite all that, it isn't enough to stop a Spartan II at full strength. Not even close.

The Master Chief held Malphite's rock hard fist in his hands, and pushed. Malphite slid back a step back, unable to do anything as the Spartan pushed.

Malphite never showed any strain, but it was trying as hard as it could to crush something that was just as strong as it was. Malphite gave a roar and slammed the ground with its other hand, trying to use the shockwave to offset the Chief.

That was a mistake.

The Chief used the Shards momentary lapse of concentration to pull forward on the being, making it stumble another step, but forward this time. The Chief then spun, twisting the rocky joint in a way that it should not be twisted.

Rock spiralled off of Malphite, its arm shattered at the elbow. The beast roared in what the Chief assumed was pain, before crumbling in a ring of blue light.

****THE MASTER CHIEF HAS SLAIN MALPHITE.****

The Chief stood there for a moment, panting. His muscles burned, the effort of overpowering the stone monster having took a lot of effort.

A swish.

The Chief spun around, picking up his fallen DMR just as the Champion rustling the bushes to his left reveal themselves.

"Ahâ€¦| Could you not aim that at me, space warrior?"

The Chief somewhat reluctantly lowered the DMR as Ahri fully made her presence known.

"Soâ€¦|," she began. "Shall we push the lane?"

The Chief shook his head. "Shop. Need to get an Infinity Edge."

_Another one? _That was the Chief's Summoner, a female he hadn't fought alongside before.

Teleport me back, please.

It would probably best if you pushed lane, so that we can get top while they get bot.

The Chief shook his head again, this time with a bit of exasperation. He began to walk down the lane, ignoring Ahri fully as he followed

the minions.

Ahri skipped after him. The Chief allowed her to kill the enemy minions, knowing she needed the extra currency more than he did.

"Isn't the rift fun?" Ahri said a little bit playfully, bouncing an orb of power from hand to hand.

The Chief didn't immediately respond. When he did, it was as critically as he judged everything around him. "These are war games without wars."

Ahri tilted her head a little too far back. "Does the rift need to make sense?"

The Chief sighed internally. He had answered in the hope that the conversation would be ended, not continued. "There isn't any point to keep dangerous warriors on edge all the time," he reasoned, "without good reason."

Ahri giggled, a giggle that seemed to at once condemn his words and laud them. "You think too much," she said.

The Chief didn't react or say anything. He just focused on pushing out the lane, grabbing a turret before the enemy team reacted.

Eventually the minions pushed right up to the enemy's second-tier tower, and the two champions began to attack it. Chunks of stone began to fall off of it, gradually lowering the tower's overall health.

The Chief stopped firing his DMR, the final shot sounding louder than the others he had fired. He looked around critically. He could tell something was wrong, but he just didn't know what. His motion sensor detected enemies, but there were many pings on it—far more than would account for the enemy team.

Something was invisible.

He looked to Ahri, who was obliviously hitting the turret still. He debated telling her to move, but decided against it. It would be better to grab a turret and a kill rather than both of them secure a single kill. Not to mention the fact that he didn't trust her enough in a fight.

He began to move, slowly searching, trying to pinpoint the location of the enemy. He moved further and further away from his companion, who was still taking the turret.

Something hit the Chief just as he fired off a shot at his attacker. The both projectiles impacted, the Spartans causing a spray of blood from the target and the targets' rooting the Chief down to the spot.

The Chief grimaced as he fought against the binding ropes around him. Rengar roared and leaped over him, bounding over to Ahri.

The Chief struggled, the ropes slowly becoming looser. He could hear

the sounds of battle behind him, and it didn't sound too good.

The ropes snapped as they finally wore off. The Chief wasted no time in powering forward for the lion.

He fired his marksman rifle with every step, every shot finding its mark despite him running. He slammed into the beast as soon as he was within range, knocking it off the kitsune and propelling it forwards.

Rengar didn't go down without a fight, though. It grabbed him as it was knocked about, carrying the Chief with it. They ended up in a pile, fighting each other at extreme close range.

This was where the hunter had the advantage. Despite the Spartan being the stronger of the two and being protected by energy shielding and power armour, the Lion had the advantage of claws, teeth, close-combat weapons, and having two more completed rune-items over the Chief.

Rengar began to slash at the Chief in wild abandon, each hit draining the shield. The Chief retaliated by hitting back, punching the beast in what he assumed were its most vulnerable areas.

Rengar merely grunted whenever a fist connected, but still slashed. The Chief knew he wouldn't last long with Rengar bearing its full weight down on him, so he tensed his muscles and pushed up, tossing the lion aside.

The Chief used the brief lull in the fighting to reach for his secondary firearm, hoping to land a quick headshot and end the fight.

Rengar was faster this time, though. It pounced right back on the Chief, this time propelling its dagger down in a savage arc that broke through the Chief's shields and into his body.

The Chief didn't gasp from the pain, however much it hurt him. He had a bit of life left in him so he got ready to redouble his efforts, knowing he wouldn't last ten more seconds like this.

Rengar suddenly arched its back and turned away, the Chief forgotten.

The Chief quickly reached around and grabbed his secondary firearm, pumping it once to make sure a shell was in the chamber, and fired straight into the beast's head.

****THE MASTER CHIEF HAS SLAIN RENGAR****

The Chief didn't get up immediately. His helmet was still making warning sounds, for the shields had yet to recharge.

A shadow crossed over him as Ahri moved next to him.

"Thanks," the Spartan said gruffly, knowing it had been her charm spell that had saved his life.

Ahri tilted her head and shrugged, smiling.

* * *

><p>The Chief walked through the hallways of the institute alone. It was early afternoon, and most people were about doing their business. The Chief himself also had business to attend to: his new security system.<p>

Over the last few days he had been developing a system in conjunction with Reighlen that would secure his room. Right now the system was still in its alpha stages, but even so it would alert him with a ping when anyone stepped into his room. He still wanted to finish it as fast as he could, though.

His motion sensor pinged, indicating someone behind him.

He turned around to see a small blonde girl, wearing a blue jump suit and some light silver armour pieces.

"I'm Lux!" She said cheerfully, a big smile on her face.

The Chief didn't say anything, the appearance of this girl catching him a bit off guard. He had been approached by adults and abhumans and aliens and assassins, but a child? That was different.

"Mind if I follow you?"

The Chief blinked at that question. He wasn't so good with social interactions, but even that question seemed off with him. Of course, he didn't give it much thought. He already knew what his answer would be.

"Don't," he said, and turned to walk away.

She followed him, or so his motion sensor told him. He realized he could barely hear her footsteps.

"Soâ€| Why do you wear that armour all the time?" she asked.

The Chief still didn't answer, although he took note of the words 'all the time.' Clearly she had been watching him for a bit.

Or maybe not. It wasn't exactly uncommon knowledge that he wore his armour the majority of the time.

"It's rather large. Is that because of all the hextech inside? Or is it something else, like those mechanical pistons?"

The Chief rounded a corner, and the girl â€" lux â€" followed. He stayed silent, unsure of what she wanted and annoyed that she wouldn't leave.

The girl made a move to touch him, then. Her hand crept forwards â€" or it appeared so to him, at least â€" and he let her. Normally he wouldn't let anyone get close him â€" his training had ingrained that trait into him â€" but he figured she wouldn't follow him around anymore if she hurt herself on his still active energy shielding.

"OW!" she cried, curling her shocked fingers into her hand.

The Spartan didn't slow down, and neither did Lux. She continued to follow him, despite the recent shock.

"Interesting," she said. "The only artificial shielding I've seen is very temporary, and usually is a result of hextech power build-up—is it inbuilt to your armour? What's the power source?"

Silence again.

"How does it stay so quiet, though? Crystals are usually rather noisy and bothersome, you know? like, there was this one time that Ezreal gave me a crystal necklace and it was, like, so nice and beautiful but it was so annoying because—"

The Chief grunted and rounded on her. Lux was forced to suddenly stop to avoid running into his shields.

"Stop spying on me," the Chief said abruptly.

Lux blinked, and her face became indignant. "That's not a very nice accusation."

The Chief didn't answer, knowing from his training that people tended to spill more secrets when the person they were talking to stayed silent.

"—I'm not a spy," she said after a minute with a frown.

"Never said you were," the Chief responded.

She blinked.

The Chief decided to elaborate a bit. He had the time to, after all. "Your footsteps are silent. Perfect for sneaking up on people to assassinate them, or get information."

Lux raised an eyebrow.

"And you may have noticed we are in the Noxian hallway. It's nice not to be heard by the enemy when you're getting military information."

Lux giggled a bit. "Your clever, to have figured this out from just my footsteps."

The Chief didn't answer. He felt no need to agree with that statement; he already knew his capabilities. He had assassinated people while in full power armour, infiltrated asteroid bases with nothing but a skin-suit, infiltrated and captured a covenant flagship with nothing but a pelican, a shortsword, and a squad of marines—

Really, this was pretty much basic stuff for him.

Lux shrugged, conceding. "I was told you were intelligent," she said. "Your right, I was spying on you—but I had no standing orders to do so. I was just curious."

The Chief tilted his head. "No point. You can't copy my armour."

they both stared at each other for a moment, and the Chief realized that his earlier assumption of the girl being a child was wrong. He could see that look in her eyes that indicated someone who had gone through a lot, a look far older than her age.

He resolved not to underestimate her.

Lux stood there, twirling her ankle around. "Soâ€|" she began. "I think you're pretty interesting. Would you like to do something?"

"No," the Master Chief said, and left her alone in the Noxian hallway. He was more eager now than before to get that security system up and running, after all.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

"â€|What is _that?_"

Marin's voice was swallowed by the massive chamber he was in. He stood beside the scientist who was currently employing him, both of them staring out at the object.

They were in one of the caverns farthest away from the central base. Really, it was more of an outpost than anything. It had taken them nearly a day of covert travel to get here, but it had been more than worth the travel time in Marin's eyes.

The object itself was massive, to say the least. It shared the same design as the last machines he had been privileged enough to see, but on a grander scale. It wasn't even close to being completed, though. Only its superstructure had been laid down â€" the rest was being magically lifted into position around the thing after being consecrated in ritual oils.

Even Marin, a jaded soul at best, had to admit it was incredible.

"It won't be finished in time," the Employer said. He seemed impassionate, despite his mighty project being assembled before him.

Marin glanced at him, not truly understanding.

"It requires far greater power than we can currently muster. As it is, my sorcerers barely can barely awaken itsâ€| intelligent core, so to speak."

Marin didn't know what he meant by the last part, but he ignored it. "What do you need of me?"

"Of you? Nothing. I am merely stating that it will be incomplete in time for the main event. Or rather, it will be complete and conscious, but without the power to move by itself."

Marin wondered what he meant by 'conscious'. Did he mean it was an artificial intelligence, like the Piltover police bots?

He didn't say any of that, though. Instead he said, "So we have to make do without it, then."

The Employer turned and looked at him hard. "Yes. And I hope you know what will happen if you fail."

* * *

><p>"Do you not see how our enemies already gather, waiting to feast on us? Noxus is rallying; they have already hurt us in Kalamanda; killing our ambassador€ and now they use daemons to kill one of our greatest advocates for peace, a mighty commander you all knew and loved. So I say to our enemies: If you so wish to kill our people of peace, we shall send you people of war." €" Jarvan III, King of Demacia, in a war council trying to authorize the fortifying of Demacian borders.

* * *

><p>Hi. Just some brief notes, here: I don't mean to make the Chief sound overpowered or stronger than any champ on the rift, I'm merely tryng to convey that he is the strongest. Just imaging Malphite had the strength of a Brute Chieftan, and you'll understand what I was trying to say.

Sorry the chapters still are not all that long, but we'll get to the longer ones soon enough.

Aaaand just wanted to say i'm really glad people actually enjoy this story, and thank you to everyone who's reviewed. It helps me learn to write better sincee I have no clue what i'm doing.

Quick note: for some reason, the site is having this chapter show up as Chapter 19, and I cant seem to fix that. Just to clarify: this is chapter 18. Not 19. apologies if this causes some confusion.

wort.

20. Chapter 19(real)

Chapter 19: Buried and Forgotten

"But I don't want to," the Master Chief said.

He was currently standing in the main hall of the Institute of War, facing a certain pink-haired enforcer. It was early morning, so the area was rather empty €" just the way the Chief liked it.

"Well€" I mean, it would be good for ya to get out, y'know?"

The Chief tilted his head and said, "no."

Bi tilted her head back and sighed. "Geez, tin man, you don't make this shit easy."

The Chief stayed silent for a full minute, then turned and began to walk away. He had resolved to himself that whenever he got into a

conversation where the other party did not speak for sixty seconds, he would leave in order to save himself time and annoyance.

"Oh, right," Vi called out at random, sounding as if she was speaking more to herself than the Chief. "Caitlyn said you could visit the _Dawn, _if you want."

The Chief turned right back towards Vi.

"When can we leave?" He asked.

* * *

><p>They both stared at the train â€" a massive, clunky Piltover invention. It levitated half a meter off the ground, most of the vehicles bulk lifted by the large generators contained in various containers scattered about its length. The train was supposed to take passengers straight to Piltover, which was why the Chief was standing there. Caitlyn had left for the city-state over a week ago, and had called Vi back also to help her solve a particularly troublesome case. Vi had also tried to convince the Spartan to come and visit for a few days, too.<p>

Naturally, he had wanted to decline, but the prospect of seeing the _Forward unto Dawn _was too much to pass up. He was eager to get onboard, salvage what he couldâ€| and try and comb through the computer systems for what was left of Cortana.

The train's loud whistle broke the Chief's thoughts.

"We should prolly board," Vi said, her mouth stuffed with a cupcake.

The Chief turned to regard her. "Why did I take a carriage here if there was a train?"

Vi blinked and chewed thoughtfully. "I dunno," she said. "Ask Caitlyn when we arrive. She knows all this shit. I just punch things."

The Chief shook his head, moving towards the entranceway with their bags in each of his hands.

Vi had packed for the trip, bringing whatever it was enforcer women bring along on trips. The Chief had stuffed his duffle bag with his easier to carry weapons â€" the rest were in a hidden location on Institute grounds. He had spent most of the last week combing for such a place, and it had been perfect â€" but too small for him to sue as a safe house. The search for one of those still continued.

Vi stayed just behind him, finishing her cupcake. She was wearing casual clothes, made of some sort of local leather, and the Chief thought the outfit looked a little bit odd on her â€" although he just preferred armour in general, so he couldn't really judge.

The doorman who was checking tickets looked over the Chief once and his skin went several shades paler. He reluctantly began to extend his hand forward, readying himself to ask for the Spartans ticket, but then he spotted Vi.

"Ahâ€| Enforcerâ€|" he stammered out, looking a little bit

relieved.

The Chief glanced back in confusion, but was pushed forwards by Vi, who just smiled and exchanged pleasantries with the man.

Vi led the Chief to a compartment closer to the front of the train. The Chief placed the bag in a compartment above the seats, and then sat down.

"So," Vi began. "The doorman back there â€" he's a total wimp. He gets scared of anyone bigger than him."

"Okay," said the Chief, unsure of why the company did not fire the man. If he was unable to perform his job, than he was useless.

"The only reason he isn't scared of me is cuz' he's so used to me. And I'm technically a cop, so it's kinda reassuring."

"Okay?"

Vi stretched out her legs on the seat across from the Chief and said, "cuz were champs, we get on free, which is why he sees me so much. Although I guess I could just get a Summoner to summon us to other citiesâ€" but they're dicks, so whatever."

"â€"Okayâ€" "

The pair of them sat there in silence for a few minutes before she said, "K, I'm gunna take a nap while we travel there. You should get some shut eye, too."

She promptly fell asleep.

"â€"But it's still morning," the Chief said to himself.

The trip to Piltover took several hours, and the Chief did anything but sleep during that time. Mostly he just recorded the landscape around the train and compiled it into a database that he could use in case he ever needed to cross by this way on foot.

Not that he expected to.

As the train neared Piltover, the landscape transformed into a more urban sprawl. The Chief could see people travelling, automatic carts driving along, and city flags snapping in the wind.

Despite the fact that the train was nearing the city, it seemed to be speeding up. It was a gradual speed up, but the Chief was certain the train was now travelling too fast to safely stop at the station.

The Chief looked to Vi, who was still sleeping on the bench. The Chief glanced around, and then got up. He opened the sliding glass door and poked his head outside, looking both ways. It appeared, at first glance, that no one else had noticed anything wrong. Everyone was still in there cabins, waiting for the train to stop.

The Chief left the room and slid the door shut. He began to walk towards what he assumed was the front of the train. The halls of the coach were long, but the Chief passed through them quickly. He moved past his coach and into the next one, which was identical to his. He

walked through that one briskly as well, but examined his surroundings to see if he could find anything off.

Nothing seemed wrong, though. At least, not until he reached the door at the end of the coach.

While his motion sensor did not detect anything nearby, his visor's thermal imaging painted a different picture. There were obvious heat signatures along the floor near the door, signs of some sort of struggle. The Chief just couldn't understand how the people around him hadn't heard a struggle.

He opened the door cautiously, his magnum already out and aiming forwards.

The room he had entered was one of the generator cars distributed around the train. Great copper wires lined the walls, and even under the metal grating of the floor. The center of the room featured a massive crystal; or rather, two crystals. Each one was a half sphere, both facing each other. They were surrounded by a large crystal ball which featured more clear tubes sticking out of it and linking to the copper pipes.

The Chief examined all this in a heartbeat. He followed the thermal trail with his eyes, and found the bodies. He didn't even have to go up to them to know they were dead.

He pressed on, already knowing something bad was happening.

He passed through the car, and found himself in the control room of the train. There were another two bodies piled in the corner, each one slain by a cut to the throat.

The Chief looked up on the roof, and saw a hatch had been left partially open. Whoever had done this had likely already escaped. The Chief wanted to go after him, but knew stopping the train was a bigger priority.

He looked around for something that looked like it controlled the speed, and found a lever. Or what was left of one, anyways. The lever had been broken, the switch stuck in the fastest setting.

The Chief grimaced as he bent down beside it. It was irreparable, that was for certain. The Spartan began to pry the lever housing open, peeling the metal plating off and throwing it aside.

Inside the housing were three tubes. Each one was clear, filled with a different glowing liquid. Copper rings orbited each one.

The Chief was at a loss. It was then that he remembered he had no idea how to work hextech. He looked at each wire, deciding to wing it and assume the brightest glowing one controlled the speed.

But how did he go about slowing down the train?

It was then that he remembered the static. Every time he had come into contact with one of the hextech crystals, it had caused static to wash across his shields. That would naturally mean that the two of them were incompatible, so it would be possible for him to stop the current with his shields.

At least, he assumed that was how it worked. Cortana had never really explained how this stuff worked. Not to mention the fact that the crystal generator in the other room hadn't caused any disruption " but that may just have been the cause of the crystal ball shielding it.

The Chief took a breath and grabbed hold of the tube, and instantly the smell of ozone filled the air. Static began to travel up his arms, his shield flaring brighter and brighter each second. Then, with a large booming noise, his shields detonated and the tube sparked ever brighter than before.

But it didn't stop there. The tube still seemed fine, and static was still traveling along the Chief's armoured frame.

He grimaced, the massive amount of static causing some pain to him. His helmet systems began to flash as the power overload became too much to handle. Other armour system also began to go into red alert, assuming he was in critical condition.

Still he held on. Everything he had experienced so far didn't even match what he had gone through on instillation 04.

The smell of ozone was far stronger now, and steam began to rise off the tube in his hand.

Another booming noise, much more massive than the last one, echoed around the room. The control room went dark, and the Chief experienced a brief moment of freefall before feeling the train hit the ground and squeal to a stop.

"Chief!? What's going on?"

The Chief turned to see Vi in the doorway, her outfit scorched by static from the room behind her.

It was then that the Chief realized his mistake. He had assumed that the brightest tube had controlled speed, but in actuality it must have been linked to the generators powering the train. His shields would have been trying to compete with all the generators, and they had barely won " or barely lost.

"Alright, your explaining this one to Caitlyn," Vi said.

* * *

><p>"Not even five minutes in Piltover and you already stopped a massive train crash," the Sheriff of Piltover said.<p>

_And probably started it, too, _the Chief thought. It was extremely unlikely that the train he had just happened to be on nearly crashed.

Vi and the Chief stood side-by-side, standing in front of Caitlyn and a squad of officers. There had been two squads of officers when the pair of them had stepped onto the platform, but they had quickly dispersed to search the train. Not that it would do the any good: the Chief and Vi had already combed through it and found no trace of any assailant.

"Well, I'm glad you two are okay. And, I have to say," she chuckled then, "you look good."

The Chief and Vi both answered, "thanks," at the same time, and then turned to glare at each other.

Neither of them had left the train unscathed. The Chief's armour was blackened in places with more paint peeling off than before. Static was also periodically flashing across his armour as the shields systems tried to reboot itself. His shields were definitely not as good as they used to be.

Vi, on the other hand, had several burn marks on her skin and her clothes were more tattered than before. Her injuries had all been suffered trying to get through the generator room in the midst of an overload — a testament to Vi's tradition of barging into every situation without any tactical planning.

Caitlyn shook her head. "Alright, you two. Chief, Ezreal is here to bring you to the _Dawn._ Vi, you and I have to start busting that triad."

"Fine." Vi followed the group off to a squad car, leaving the Chief alone with the only non-cop that was in the group of officers — Ezreal.

"'Sup," he said. Ezreal wore a white vest and black pants, looking very classy for someone who was supposedly a scientist/inventor.

The Chief didn't answer.

"Right. Well, let's be off. We should try and get to the _Dawn_ while we still have daylight left." Ezreal turned and led the Chief towards a cart similar to the one he had arrived at the League in.

"Where are they going?" Asked Chief a little bit unexpectedly.

"Who, Caitlyn?" Ezreal opened the door of the carriage for the Chief, then got in after him. "The Triad they're trying to take down has made threats that they're going to bomb sections of the city, so the police are in hype-mode now."

The Chief again did not say anything. He processed the information, and found himself a tiny bit angry. This 'triad' reminded him of the insurrection, the enemy he had been originally created to destroy.

Humans really were universally the same.

"I have to say, your ship is pretty amazing," Ezreal said. "It's full of the most incredible things, and we barely searched even half of it."

The Chief glared at the man. Despite being unable to see the Spartan's face, the glare of his golden visor was enough to make him nervous.

"Don't worry," he tried to assure the Chief. "We aren't messing with anything, just studying."

The Chief looked out the window, down to the area where the _Dawn _was being kept. Despite it being half of its former glory, it towered above the city.

_We'll see about that, _the Chief thought.

* * *

><p>Chief knew instantly that the vehicles were inoperable.<p>

At first glance, they were in their normal positions, polished and ready for battle. However, he could tell easily that they would be unable to threaten a mouse. He could see some wearing on the steel of the chassis', evidence of the sea water ruining parts. He could see the telltale signs of an oil spill, which probably meant the vehicles no longer had anything to run on. And it was unlikely that the weapons would be firing. Unlike the infantry firearms the Chief carried, the vehicles hadn't been protected from the water.

That made the Chief somewhat sad. He would have liked a Scorpion to be at operational capacity. That would be certain to dissuade any would-be assassins.

"Ah, Master Chief!" Heimerdingers voice echoed across the space. The inventor had set up a rudimentary command center in the midst of the vehicle bay, the most intact and stable area on the ship. "I took good care of you ship for you!"

Some unidentifiable hextech device beside the Chief sparked brightly. "So I see," he said.

"Come, come," Heimerdinger called out, and the Chief went towards him.

"Are all the sections cleared out?" The Chief asked.

The Inventor nodded. "All the water has been drained out. We have been trying to clear debris out of the passageways, but that is still in the works."

The Chiefs nodded. That would explain why his weapon shipments had been few and far between â€" the armouries of the vessel would likely be blocked off, and control panels would be still locked down or waterlogged.

It was then that the Chief remembered something.

"The bridge," Chief said suddenly. "Have you cleared a path to it yet?"

Heimerdinger shook his head. "Debris in front of the door. We need heavy lift equipment to clear it."

The Chief thought about that for a moment. He could clear the debris, easy. He wanted to get to the bridge, for two reasons. The first was to delete any compromising data â€" he was still sure the enemy (whoever that was) had taken his tech. The second was more personal â€" a search for his missing companion. If there was any place he could accomplish those two tasks, it was there.

"Follow," Chief said, and began to walk towards the bridge.

It took him less than five minutes to clear the debris. It had consisted of several girders and pipes, all of which he was able to simply push aside. The door had been another matter, though " the panel seemed to have been busted in by one of the fallen girders, so the Chief had to force the doors open manually.

His heart fell upon seeing the state of the bridge. It hadn't been spared the attention of the rest of the ship " it too had been ravaged by the forces of the sea.

He made his way to the central command station which was uplifted from the rest of the deck. Heimerdinger and his scientists began to comb their way around the room, looking at all the advanced technologies.

Normally the Chief would not have let them get anywhere close to the technological wreckage, but the unknown enemy already had the most dangerous tech aboard. At this point, any waterlogged devices they found would not cause any more harm to him. It was the data he was worried about " but they wouldn't be able to access the computer systems anyways. They didn't have the expertise or equipment to do that.

The power was out, so the Chief had to reboot the systems from the bridges' isolated auxiliary generator. From beneath the floor a loud grinding noise began and weak lights flickered on across the bridge.

The computer screen stayed black for a full minute. Then, suddenly, a line of white text appeared.

The Chief knew that the holo-boards would be offline so as to save auxiliary power, so he used the ancient touch-keyboard instead. He began to type out lines as Heimerdinger approached from behind.

"Chief?" he asked, wondering at what the human was doing.

No answer.

"Is everything all right?"

The Master Chief did not turn around. He stared at the screen, not trying to comprehend what the words on it signified.

```
_**Stop: 0x00X000X02E (0xXC2000, 0xGE3000)**_
```

```
_**UNSC D22 DB status: FAILED**_
```

```
_**Timestamp status: FAILED**_
```

```
_**FeFG001: FAILED**_
```

```
_**GeD0001: FAILED**_
```

```
_**Datasync: FAILED**_
```


**Database access: FAILED**
**Password : FAILED**
**X000300: FAILED**
**Fef1100: FAILED**
_**System_load: FAILED**_
_**Nav_semipoint: FAILED**_
_**AI_UNSC**_ _**CTN 0452-9: LOAD FAILED**_
**Database cannot be found. **
**System will be shut down.**

The system had not just been shut down or wiped in accordance with the Cole Protocol â€” the entire system was missing.

Who could have done such a thing?

And why?

* * *

><p>"Are you asking me if I want to let him leave, am going to let him leave, or should I let him leave? See, while all those sentences may seem alike, they have different meaning. Regardless of which one you meant, you fail to understand one thing: he is a tool. Like a tool, you use it for the betterment of something else. His usefulness far outweighs his detrimental presence. So long as he is shackled by his past, he is usable. And, just like a tool, once his usefulness is ended he will be tossed aside â€” only in this instance, that involves being sent home, as far away from here as time and space will allow." â€” High Councillor Kolminye, to her second in command, asking her about her future intentions.

* * *

><p>Hello. We have finally got to our first arc where the Chief goes to some place other than the Institute.

**So... srry if this chapter seems a bit rushed, but I wrote it on my phone while I was at a wedding on the weekend, and I just didn't have the time to go back and re-write it. So yeah. **

right. well, review if you guys have the time to, and I hope you guys come back next chapter!

21. Chapter 21

Chapter 20: This Cave is Not a Natural Formation

"So you believe that this 'enemy' you think exists somehow managed to steal you're â€” system filled with all the data you have, which they then used to create the weapons and automatons they are using to attack you and various areas around Valoran?"

The Master Chief was currently sitting with Caitlyn in one of her favourite tea shops, sipping tea while he told her his suspicions. Or, to be more accurate, he was standing because his weight had already broken one chair and had ceased drinking the tea after he had shattered the fragile china cup.

"Yes," he replied honestly. The Chief had spent the entire day before trying to boot up all the _Dawns _systems, but to no avail. With most of the data on the mainframe gone â€" actually, everything except the most basic commands and anything that hadn't been in the localized system â€" the Chief was stuck. He had the weapons on the ship still, but no longer had access to data, ship-based weapons, or even the fuel stores inside â€" which in turn meant he had no way of getting the vehicles to work.

Caitlyn shook her head. "There isn't any way that someone could have sneaked by the defences â€" Heimerdinger set up his turrets _everywhere._ And I really do mean that. I asked him to guard my house one, and I later found a turret in my toilet. Oh, and not to mention the fact that none of us know how to use your tech, so there isn't any way we could have taken it anyways."

The Chief shook his head. "They could have used magic, or stolen it when the _Dawn _was still submerged. Regardless, someone stole and deleted the system after I left Piltover."

Caitlyn sipped her tea and then gently put the cup down. "Chief, I will help you whichever way I can, but at the moment I'm more than a little pressed with this Triad business, so you can't expect much. Once that is done, I can do more, but beforehandâ€¦ I can't spare enough people to begin anything near a systematic search."

"There is a way," Chief said, gazing at a trail of coloured streamers that a little girl was running with. "Let me search the city myself."

Caitlyn sputtered her mouthful of tea landing on the table. "Absolutely not!" she cried, dabbing at the spilt tea with a napkin. "There is no way I can allow a super-soldier become a vigilante and roam around the city. Already that business with the train caused too much interest in you." She looked as if she was going to say more, and then stopped.

The Chief glanced down at her briefly, then lifted his eyes back to the peaceful view of the plaza. He nodded his head.

Caitlyn let out a small sigh and pushed her plate aside, leaving a couple of shiny coins beside it. "Thank you, Chief," she said, rising up. "I'll help as soon as I can. In the meantime, try and enjoy Piltover, justâ€¦ don't flaunt your weapons too much. I'd rather not have to arrest you."

The Chief tilted his head fractionally, wondering how the sheriff intended to do that. He was pretty sure her cuffs wouldn't even cover half his wrist.

She walked away, lifting her hand in farewell.

The Chief watched her leave, then turned his attention back to the

plaza. He wondered he should leave his weapons back in his room like Caitlyn suggested " then dismissed the thought. No matter how safe she claimed the city was, he knew it was not, and he'd rather have his weapons on him if something did happen. And he wasn't some random civilian, ready to gun down the first person that looked suspicious.

The Chief began to walk down the road, leaving the plaza behind him. There wasn't really much for him to do in Piltover - he wasn't one to walk around just to take in the sights. With his business at the _Dawn _concluded, there really wasn't much keeping him in the city, except for the fact that this was his first real outing. He was a little bit reluctant to cut it short, no matter how boring it may be.

He passed some stalls, and realized he was in a market district of the city. While there were plenty of stores in the city, travelling merchants seemed abundant in Valoran.

He stopped by one stall which featured some jewelry. While he did not care for them, a bright blue one caught his eye " it reminded him painfully of Cortana's light.

"Well, good sir, is there anything that you like?"

The Chief raised his gaze fractionally and saw the stall owner looking at him with a painfully wide smile.

"No thanks," Chief said, and made to move away.

"You sure?" the owner called out. "Something for your lady friend, perhaps?"

"No thanks," the Chief said again, and walked away. He thought about what the man had said, the thing about the lady friend. Was that what you were supposed to buy them? Shiny baubles? Where they hidden shield-generators or something?

The Chief shook his head. Civilian life was way too confusing.

The Chief stepped off the main road and onto the sidewalk, avoiding a speeding car. In the direction he had turned he could see the _Forward Unto Dawn _in the distance.

According to Heimerdinger, the _Dawn _had become a sort of attraction for the city. People couldn't visit it, of course, but it seemed that everyone wanted to be in the same city-state as the warship from the heavens, or whatever it was they had labelled it as.

The Chief didn't care one way or the other, especially now seeing as all potentially compromising data was gone from the ship. The only thing he didn't like was the attention it gave him. The only thing people wanted to see more than the ship was the space warrior it bore.

Those that wanted to approach him were too nervous to do so, however. His general demeanour, Mjolnir and weapons tended to do that.

The Chief resumed walking, his gaze straight ahead. There really wasn't anything interesting around here.

Well, except for that.

Before the Chief had been deployed in any real combat scenarios, the UNSC had ODSST troopers launch raids on insurrectionist's depots with the help of bomb-detecting drones. Said drones had all sorts of chemicals stored in their database: man-made ones to natural ones. It could even make assumptions for explosive chemicals that hadn't been seen before based off of its molecular structure. The Chief's helmet had one of those systems, and though he had never really needed to use it, right now it picked up traces of possible explosive chemical compounds on the sidewalk.

His visor lit up the path of the compound, and it trailed off the sidewalk and into a nearby alleyway. While it could be nothing more than hextech fireworks, the Chief decided to follow it anyways, reasoning he had nothing better to do anyways.

The alley way was narrow, especially for someone of his bulk. Eventually, though, it widened out into a side street, albeit a shady-looking one. There were several people around, but the Chief payed them no heed. No one would bother him.

There was a lot more of the chemical on the ground, too. The Chief bent down and tried to examine it. It was oily and red in colour, and that didn't ring any bells in the Chief's mind " not that he expected it to. Really, he was so oblivious to this world that it could just be dish soap " if they even used that here.

"That's explosive residue, alright," A voice said from somewhere behind the Chief.

The Chief rose up, grabbing his assault rifle in one smooth motion and aiming it at the unknown person. His motion sensor hadn't detected anyone near him. Was it broken again?

"Now now," said Graves, holding a hand up. "No need to be so hostile."

Graves was sitting on a low garage roof, and his sitting position hadn't triggered the motion sensor.

Chief mentally cursed. He was letting all manner of people sneak up on him, and that was a serious problem. He'd have to train harder once he got back to the Institute.

"You can't be here," Chief said, which was true. Graves was outlawed from Piltover, and Caitlyn would probably arrest him on sight, league champion or not.

"I got some business to attend to," the Outlaw responded, tossing his cigar to the ground.

The Chief made the connection at once. "Explosives?"

Graves nodded. "The Triad purchases explosives that use that, and I have a bone to pick with them." He grunted. "Cheate' me on too many times."

The Chief considered that. Graves, the outlaw, was here to fight

against the Triad, a common enemy to the police force. Did that give him adequate reason to stay here?

No.

"Leave," Chief said, and turned to follow the rest of the trail. While he wasn't all that eager to much in and help the police force bust a crime syndicate, his anti-insurrectionist teachings were much too hard to ignore.

Graves grunted behind him. "That'll take you to their main base of operations," he said. "A warehouse that leads to their underground base â€" fortified, with enough fail-safes to lock down the whole area long enough for them to escape quickly."

The Chief stopped. "You know another way in," he said, saying it in a way that made it more of a statement than a question.

Graves smiled. "I know another way in. But I only show you if I go with you."

The Chief sighed internally. While he _could_ leave this to the police force, he knew it would be faster if he did this himself â€" and with a lesser loss of lives. He also knew that if Graves didn't show him the second way in, the Triad would bolt, making the job of the police so much harder. And he really wasn't all that eager to spend more time than necessary fighting his way into a crime syndicates base. Unless Graves was bluffingâ€|

"Why?" asked the Chief.

Graves tilted his head with a frown, but the Chief still hadn't turned back and so could not see his expression.

"Why do you want to go with me?" he clarified after Graves didn't respond.

Graves hopped off the roof and walked beside the Chief. His shotgun was strapped to his back, and he had a revolver on his waist. "Hell, I aint the kind of guy that lets a good thing slip away."

The Chief turned to look at him. He should have figured this was just another case of someone taking advantage of his presence. Not that he really minded much; UNSC soldiers did it all the time. Everyone wants to play tag-along with the hyper-lethal supersoldier.

"Okay," Chief said, giving in. It wasn't like he really had anything against Graves, and he didn't want to get into a protracted fight with the Triad. Speed was key here.

* * *

><p>The second entrance was a classic sewer entrance, set into the wall that composed the bridge. It was large enough for a vehicle to drive through, which was evident from the tire marks on the wet paving beside it.<p>

Graves looked at the Spartan, who was crouched beside the entrance, peering through the bars. "See anything?" he asked.

The Chief shook his head. "No guards for a long way."

Graves nodded. "Open her up, then."

The Chief placed his AR on the ground and grabbed hold of the two middlemost bars, pulling at them lightly. The bars popped off, making a gap large enough for both of them to crawl through.

"When I said 'open her up,' I didn't mean rip it apart," Graves drawled.

The Chief shrugged. He picked his assault rifle back up and moved in, walking as quietly as his armour allowed.

It was fairly dark in the tunnel, but the Chief was more than capable of seeing in the dark and Graves didn't complain.

They moved like that for a while, the tunnel slowly growing larger every few meters. As they pressed on, they began to see grate covers on the floor, with light spilling out of them. His motion sensor began to light up with faded red dots, indicating enemies beneath them.

"Wait," Graves whispered, and crouched beside one of the grates.

The Chief stopped and looked back. He tilted his head in question.

"Below us are the storage areas. This is where they'll keep the bombs."

The Chief crouched by the grate also, and saw that he was correct. His helmet sensors were picking up massive amounts of possibly explosive chemicals.

Chief looked at the outlaw. "You know a lot about them," he said.

Graves snickered. "I used to work with 'em," he said. "Swindled them, more like. 'Till they swindled me, and I 'aint never forgiving them for that. Just got sidetracked is all, couldn't get 'em sooner."

The Chief shook his head. Civilian life really was too confusing. At least the Human-Covenant war had been clear-cut, black and white.

He moved to grab the grate, but Graves stopped him. "Wait up," he said. "Need a cigar."

Chief stared at him. Graves ignored it and took his time, slowly making a fresh cigar, and then lighting it.

The Chief shook his head. He reached down, grabbed the grate, and in one smooth motion ripped it out and threw it aside.

The guards in the room below all immediately looked up. Because they were part of a crime syndicate, they were far better trained than the average criminal. Each one began to reach for their weapons, some moving for cover, and one running for the large alarm system mounted on the wall.

Not one of them was able to clear their weapons from their holsters.

Spartan-117 dropped down, hitting the ground with enough force that it broke tiles and sent up dust. With quick, sharp bursts from his MA5C he took out every guard in the room.

Graves dropped down after him, much more gracefully. "Nice," he said around his cigar.

The Chief moved to the first container he saw and opened it, revealing rows of stacked bombs that somewhat resembled ancient dynamite. He noted that each one lacked any way to prime them, which meant they could only be remotely triggered.

He glanced around the room, counting the amount of boxes that were roughly the same size and design as this one: 22.

"We need to disable these explosives quickly," he said. "Then we leave."

Graves frowned. "Then the leadership'll just--"

"We aren't here to start a war," the Chief interrupted. "Disable the bombs. Then we leave."

Graves hesitated for a second as he considered pushing the argument, but let moved to do as he was told. It seemed he wasn't to eager to stay here longer than necessary without his super-soldier companion.

They each got through less than three crates when they heard rapidly approaching feet.

The Chief pointed to one of the doors, and aimed his rifle at it. Graves did the same.

As soon as they opened, they both opened fire. The Chief cut down the majority, and graves took down the rest, but the enemy still managed to let loose a couple of rounds.

"Shit," Graves said, looking back. The Chief followed his gaze, and saw the neat hole the enemy projectile had burned through the crate. But that wasn't what made him concerned.

He opened the crate, which was larger and far sturdier than the bomb-carrying ones.

What was inside made his blood run cold.

Weapons, each one resembling a plasma repeater, were stacked inside. There were also handles of weapons which resembles the energy blades the Mechs had used, back on the attack of the Institute.

The Chief looked around, seeing a bunch more containers similar to this one.

Graves shook his head. "Well, this can't be good."

The Chief grabbed one of each of the weapons and placed them on his

back for later study. He then looked around the room again. "You're familiar with these explosives, right?" he asked.

Graves nodded. "Yeah, I had ma' fair share work with 'em"

"What's the blast radius of them," Chief asked.

"Not very large individually," he drawled, thinking. "But the explosive blast becomes greater with each time the magic field encounters more magic, so you put some together and they make a big boom. But they're useless without the dets."

He looked to the Chief. "Why, what're ya thinking?"

The Chief calmly grabbed one of his plasma grenades and bounced it a couple of times in his palm.

Graves smiled. "Yeah, that should about do it."

The Chief pointed to the room that the enemy had entered from, and Graves began running. The Spartan quickly primed the plasma and dropped it in the nearest bomb crate.

In truth, he really didn't want to make this much of a mess in Piltover, but these weapons proved that some enemy was out there with his tech " and he would be damned if he let these criminals use them. The best way to get rid of this, and their operation, was a good old fashioned explosion.

He ran quickly, covering the ground in a few bounds and shutting the door behind him. Not that it would help.

Graves was still running, and the Chief was beside him.

Behind them they could hear the explosion begin.

Graves mumbled. "Well, shi-"

* * *

><p>Caitlyn took the criminal out with a headshot, stopping him from stabbing one of her officers in the back.<p>

They were currently in warehouse 12-b, one of the many that littered this side of Piltover. She had come here with two squads and Vi on the rumor that the Triad was moving weapons here, but that seemed false. There was nothing here, and the entire facility went into lockdown as soon as they had arrived. They wouldn't even be able to search the place as soon as warehouse district management got involved. While the Sheriff was sure the managers were in on the shady dealings here, she had no proof, and more importantly no warrant.

The last few criminals took cover behind a few crates near the far wall.

Caitlyn motioned to Vi. "Care to make a door?" she asked.

Vi smirked. "Sure, cupcake," she said.

Something began to whine on the far side of the room, where the criminals were.

"What's that?" one of the other officers asked, right before a stream of blue bullets impacted all around them.

"Cover!" Caitlyn yelled as Vi tackled her down.

"Why do they have a turret in here?" The Piltover Enforcer demanded. "And why is it shooting FREAKIN' BLUE BULLETS?"

Caitlyn heard one of her officers cry out in pain. Several bullets began to land around the Sheriff, creating patches of scorched, melted ground. She gritted her teeth. "It looks like the Chief's tech," she said.

Vi nodded as she fiddled with the dial on one of her gauntlets. "Yeahâ€¦ I think I remember something similar back when those rouge Mechs went crazy-time back at the League."

Caitlyn nodded, trying to make sure her top hat didn't fly off.

"K, cupcake, Imma go in hard, assault and battery style. Cover me, alright?"

Caitlyn nodded, reluctant to let her partner go out into the danger but knowing they would all die from the turret if she didn't.

"On three," the Enforcer said. "One, Twoâ€¦"

There was a massive explosion. The entire back half of the room collapsed in, blasting all the criminals forward.

Dust spread across the room as debris rained down. The massive wave of heat came next, making it hard to breath.

Caitlyn dropped her file and began to cough just as one of the criminals who was knocked forward landed beside her.

He looked up at her, noting her lack of weaponry. He raised his blackened hand, a crude revolver clutched in his palm.

A massive green shape landed overtop the man, shattering the pavement. The Master Chief calmly reached down and broke the man's hand, causing a scream of pain.

Vi and Caitlyn both stared at the Spartan just as Graves moved up behind him.

"Well, 'aint this jus' a bloody reunion," the outlaw said, his clothing all torn and burned.

"â€¦I didn't even get to three," Vi complained.

* * *

><p>Hello all. Here we have the second installment in the ark in which the Master Chief goes somewhere other than the League. yaaaaaaaaaaaaaay.

****On a serious note, i seem to be getting so many back-to-back assignments its hard to write anymore. But i'll still have chapters up regularly, but they may be shorter than you guys (and I) might like.****

****oh, and this chapter is appearing as Chapter 21, but its just chapter 20.****

****As ever, review if there was anything you feel is worth reviewing about, because that will help me write better int he future. If not, then I hope you enjoyed the chapter(?) and hope you guys come again next time(?)****

22. Chapter 22

Chapter 21: Latchkey

The building was made of white marble, featuring a large staircase leading up to the main entrance. Massive double bronze doors were set into the entrance, each one inlaid with paneling depicting different scenes. Pillars were dotted around the bottom of the staircase and atop it, lending it an ancient, almost god-like look. To the average citizen, it would be imposing, powerful; the perfect place for the Governor of the city.

The Master Chief, however, was unimpressed. He had seen much more magnificent structures in his time, and this was a minor footnote in comparison to them.

"Maybe you should have worn something nice," Caitlyn murmured, fixing her top hat.

They both were standing in front of the building, all because of the events of the day before. Despite Caitlyn's worry that the explosion â€" and the Chiefs involvement in it â€" would cause a major ruckus, the Governor of the town seemed to heartily approve of it. He had dismissed all charges made by warehouse district managers, and invited the Chief over for a 'victory celebration,' which of course would include some sort of political manoeuvring â€" at least, that's what the Chief assumed.

"No," the Chief responded, unwilling to wear anything other than his armour while out of the League.

Caitlyn gave a small sigh. "Well," she began, "get up there. It's never good to keep the Governor waiting."

The Chief looked at her. She shrugged. "I'll come by after, for the party. Try not to destroy anything, okay?"

The Chief nodded, and watched her leave. Once she was out of sight, he ascended the stairs, trying to be as light on his feet as possible. The last thing he wanted was to shatter the precious marble beneath his feet.

He reached the top of the stairs and entered through the large open doors. Immediately, bright flashed of light hit him, each light coming from any one of the dozens of people in the room.

"She told me there weren't going to be any cameras," the Chief muttered inaudibly.

"Ah, Master Chief!" a cultured voice rang out, audible even over the of voices of dozens of reporters.

The Governor walked through the press of bodies, clearly happy. He was not a large man, but certainly had some bulk on him. He wore a white suit, complete with a red tie and dress shirt.

"Glad you could make it!" he cried, and grabbed the Chief's hand as they were both photographed by the cameras.

_Sure, _the Chief thought. _I couldn't refuse anyways._

It was true. If the Chief had refused the proposal (Which he had been about to do) Caitlyn had warned him that the Governor would more than likely allow the charges to be brought up again. It had sounded like an invitation, but instead had been a demand.

"I want to thank the League of Legends for sending their greatest Champion to our city in our time of need!" The leader of Piltover shouted, and the voices and flashing redoubled.

The Chief could only wonder what was meant by 'greatest Champion.'

"It was by his hand, and the small aid of the police force, that the Triad menace was defeated!"

The Chief frowned under his helmet. It wasn't as If the crime syndicate had been defeated yet, and assuming it is was an extreme tactical liability. And the police force had been more than a 'small help'.

"Now, if you would all excuse me, I must give the hero of our city his just rewards!"

The Governor began to lead the Chief further in, the reporters scattering about as the Governors guards came in to restore some form of order.

Chief was led into a grand office. The Governor took sat down on an elaborate blue velvet chair, and gestured to the seat across from him.

The Chief declined with a gentle shake of his head.

The Governor raised an eyebrow. "Sorry about the reporters back there," he said. "It's just for posterity."

The Chief opted to say nothing.

The Governor steepled his fingers together. "I'm very glad you came to the city," he said. "You have been a great help."

The Chief tilted his head. "The Triad is not defeated yet," he stated in a flat voice.

The leader of Piltover nodded. "I know this. But telling the truth to

your people isn't always the best thing to do. Knowing when to keep a secretâ€¦ that's the true mark of a leader. And you have been a godsend regardless."

The Chief didn't say anything at that, he just lowered his head slightly. While it was something he instinctively disagreed with, he knew it was right. ONI did it all the time, especially so for the Spartan-II. If the people of the galaxy knew what the Spartans truly wereâ€¦

"So, Master Chief."

The Chief raised his head back up so he could look at the man.

"I would like for you to stay in Piltover, as a Piltover citizen."

_Ah, _the Chief thought. _Now it makes sense._

"No thank you," he responded. He shifted his stance slightly.

The Governor smiled. "I think you would want to consider the offer," he said. "You would live perfectly here, I assure you of this. Better than the League, even. You would lack for nothing, you could participate in theâ€¦ Institute games whenever you want. You would get much for simply being here."

"No thank you," the Chief said again. It wasn't the kind of offer he would even consider considering â€" he was not here to help political factions.

The Governor grabbed a bottle out from under his desk. "Shnikker?" he offered, and the Chief declined, not knowing what the beverage was.

"I'm going to be honest here, Master Chiefâ€¦ I need someone like you, here. It would help a great deal, and make this small city more of a force to be reckoned with," the Governor said while pouring a glass. "Many other factions have their eyes set on us, and not even our relationship with Demacia can change that. But youâ€¦ well, you can. In one day you've-

"No," the Spartan cut in. "I will be gone from here soon. Until then, I will be staying at the Institute â€" as per my contract." He said nothing else, and did not elaborate on anything. He always found it better to say the least amount of information as possible, and allow people to draw their own conclusions off of that.

The Governor didn't say anything, his mouth pressed into a thin white line. For a few tense moments, nothing was said.

Finally, the leader of Piltover grabbed the freshly poured drink and drained it in one gulp. "Think on it," he said. "You'll find the benefits are worth it."

He turned his chair around to face the window. "I'll see you at the party tonight."

* * *

><p>There were way too many people at the party for the Chief's liking.<p>

There were women in fancy dresses, men in beige suits, military officers in military dress. The Chief had even spotted Caitlyn and Vi around the room twice, wearing a black dress and white vest suit respectively.

The Chief just stood by a pillar near the back of the massive room, content to let everyone else socialize while he watched. Really, he wanted to leave more than anything, but he had some business to attend to and would stay until he saw that through.

Another waitress came by, offering drinks and pastries, and the Spartan declined again, for the eleventh time that night.

The music that carried around the room came from a small box on one of the side tables, and the Chief had to admit it sounded good.

"Spartan?" an eccentric voice asked from beside him.

That would be his business.

The Chief turned to face Heimerdinger fully. The inventor was wearing a greasy black suit, with a bright electric blue tie.

The Chief nodded in greeting, and looked around the room. There were too many people to conduct a conversation here.

"Follow," Chief said, and led the dongsers to one of the balconies.

It was dark outside, and there was a slight breeze. The Chief couldn't feel it, of course, but he imagined it would be pleasant.

He cut right down to business. "What did you find out?"

The day before, the Chief had tried to study the Triad weapons he had taken with him, but after a little bit of tampering, he had figured out the weapons had been magically sealed. Unable to do anything further, the Chief had given the weapons to Heimerdinger for study, and had agreed to meet at the party tonight to exchange details. While he still did not fully trust the Yordle creature, he knew he would be unable to figure anything out if he didn't get his help. And at least he was recommended by the Sheriff.

Heimerdinger passed over a rolled up blue sheet of paper. "Much much," he said.

The Chief opened up the roll, finding it to be blueprints. There was a perfect sketch of both weapons on it, detailing various parts of the weapons. Sure enough, there were several parts of the weapons that he recognized: plasma cores, heat sinks and auto-cyclers. The rest was unfamiliar to him.

"Very, very interesting," the Inventor exclaimed. "Weapon-cases sealed with enhanced hextech runes, very rare to find. Whoever made them was sure to prevent tampering. Quite ingenious really. Also,

there were many power crystals lining the weapons, for the use of shaping the plasma. The weapons fire by using strong electromagnetic pulses, directed from a larger crystal just under the core, and it is stimulated by another rune of power."

The Chief nodded, absorbing all the information. Regardless of what was contained in the weapons, all he cared about was the fact that there was, indeed, plasma and hextech inside. That meant that someone did have the capabilities to manufacture plasma weapons, and could fuse it with the steampunk technology here.

"Even I did not think to propel energy with power crystals. Whoever did this is very smart," Heimerdinger continued.

The Chief stared out at the night for a second. "Destroy the weapons," he said to the revered Inventor.

"Why?!" the Inventor cried.

The Chief didn't get to finish his sentence.

A bolt of lightning came flashing out of the night, striking the Spartan full in the chest. He was launched back several meters, his shields instantly down. He thought he felt several more impact him, but his body was numb from the initial one and so could not be sure.

The Chief thought he heard shouting around him, thought he heard the pounding of feet, but his helmet systems were down from the massive discharge. The bolt that had hit him had been particularly powerful. His audio was completely out, and the static blasting across his vision was too much for him to make anything out.

_So much for being EMP proof, _he thought. _Doesn't do much good when your enemy uses magic._

He cursed himself for having been ambushed in such a way. How had an assassin gotten so close?

He really was losing his touch.

More pounding of feet. More shouting. There was a commotion going on, the Chief was sure of it, but he couldn't hear a thing. He reached up, his gauntlet mechanisms whining in protest, and unlocked his helmet.

He took several gulps of air, the coppery taste of blood strong in his mouth. He attached his helmet to his waist and stood up.

The room was in chaos. People were running left and right, with some tables thrown up to block the soldiers coming in from the door.

Soldiers?

Gangsters. Triad grunts, carrying the tech that the Chief had destroyed not a day before. One of them noticed him, and a brief look of shock registered on his face before he pointed towards the Chief.

The Spartan dodged to the left as a wave of plasma went over him. He got behind an overturned table, noting the sluggishness of his actions. It was entirely possible that the magic had ruined the motor systems of his armour, or even damaged his electric nervous system interface " or something. Regardless, he was at a double disadvantage " no weapons and sluggish movements.

It might make the fight even for them.

The Chief glanced over the rim of the overturned table. He could see Caitlyn and Vi just in front of him, fighting some of the gangsters in hand-to-hand combat. Other Triad were leaving through a side door, possibly following fleeing guests.

Where were the Governor and his men? He couldn't see them anywhere. Not that it mattered; he needed to get rid of the threats in front of him, first.

Gunshots rang out and impacted around him. apparently all the gun-wielding grunts were concentrating on him.

He pressed his shoulder against the table, and flipped it towards the Triad. It hit four of them, knocking them flat. The Chief charged out, launching himself at the first man.

He went down without a fight. The Chief methodically moved on to the next, snapping his arm and taking his weapon before firing it full auto into his face.

The four that were down were out cold, so he ignored them. He turned to the last four and raked them with weapon fire, cutting them down quickly.

"Damn," Vi said with a cough. Her knuckles looked bloody and raw.

The Chief nodded to the party guests, who were still crouched in fear. "Take care of them."

Caitlyn and Vi stared at him as he left through the side door of the room.

He moved quickly, and found himself at the other end in no time. He moved through that door, too, and found himself in an equally large hall. Some of the Triad were down, slain by the Governors guards, but the rest were advancing on the few remaining guards that ringed the Governor and the rest of the party guests.

The Chief fired in quick bursts as he walked in, the plasma shredding the men it hit. Some of the gangsters tried to turn and engage the new threat in their midst, but quickly paled when they realized it was the still-operational Spartan.

Within ten seconds of the Chief entering the room, all the Triad grunts but one were dead. The grunt stared at the Chief, looked to his weapons, and then stared back at the Chief.

He bolted and dove out the third story window without hesitation.

The Governor and his guest's stared out the window for a full minute.

"Well," the leader of Piltover said. "The League sure picked a hell of a Champ to send our way."

* * *

><p>'Sup. Again, sorry for the short chapter, and the late update. This is Chapter 21, btw, since likes to keep skipping my chapters ahead by one.

Anyways, hope you guys enjoyed this one. As always, review if you want. If not, then I hope you continue reading this.

AAAAAAAAAAAAAND if anyone has any Halo checkpoint titles that they remember, don't hesitate to let me know. I've used up most of mine, and i'm saving the best ones for last. I don't wanna start making up Chapter titles. Rather keep it all Halo-ey.

23. Chapter 23

Chapter 22: I Would Have Been Your Daddy

TRIAD LEADERSHIP CAUGHT.

The Master Chief went over the morning headlines twice, just too be sure he was reading it correctly.

It was two days after the events at the party, and the day the Chief was scheduled to leave. He was packed (not that he had brought much) and was ready to go, despite the fact that the train wasn't due to leave until midday.

These headlines, thoughâ€| that might just put his plans on hold for a bit.

He knew it was extremely unlikely that the Triad, who had remained elusive for so long, would suddenly slip up and allow a higher up to get captured, and so soon after recent eventsâ€|

Well, he found it all suspicious, to say the least.

He looked out the window of his room, staring at the rain falling lazily from the sky.

The 'leadership' that was caught was most likely in jail, and Caitlyn was sure to have direct access to the suspect. While he was sure the Sheriff had already interrogated the suspect, he figured it wouldn't hurt to do some interrogating of his own. Of course, he'd need the Sheriff's permission for that, but he didn't think it'd be too much of a problem. He was a League Champion, after all, and keeping the peace was part of his contract.

Sort of.

He looked around his room, making sure everything was where he had left it. Once he was satisfied, he got up, opened the door, and

stepped out into the rainy day.

There were not many people about, most of them staying indoors on such a gloomy day. The ones that were out, though, carried clear dome-shaped umbrellas and hurried along the slippery streets. The Chief wondered how they were not falling.

He walked down the street, making his way closer to the large building which was the central police headquarters. Well, not large, necessarily. It was only marginally larger than the buildings in the surrounding area, and small compared to any military bases the Chief had ever seen.

A few automobiles passed by, sending water splashing around the sidewalk. Some of the passersby were less than pleased with being splashed by the soaking wet liquid, but the Chief didn't even give it a second thought. Any liquid that touched his shields was mostly vaporized, and any that wasn't didn't come into contact with his armour anyways.

Within no time, he was outside the police building. He made his way inside and to the front desk, ignoring the few individuals lined up in the waiting room.

At first the desk receptionist did not look up, so absorbed in her work. When she finally noticed the presence of someone she raised her head and immediately went several shades lighter. She quickly thrust her head back down and jammed a button over and over again, to apparently no avail.

The Chief stood there for a full minute, wondering what the attendant was doing, before he caught sight of a familiar purple top-hat bobbing down the staircase. The Sheriff of Piltover looked at the Chief with a confused look on her face.

"Chief? What's wrong?" she asked.

The Chief just tilted his head ever so slightly, not saying anything. Caitlyn seemed to have understood what he was saying and motioned him closer, before ascending the stairs.

The Chief followed her through the building, much of it already familiar to him from his first time there. It was bustling with activity, as he had expected it to be.

Caitlyn opened the door to her office, and the Chief followed her in. He remained standing by the single window in the office while the sheriff perched herself on the desk.

"Are you going to tell me what's wrong now?" she asked.

"I want to talk to him," the Chief said vaguely.

Caitlyn knew at once who he was talking about, though. She was a cop, after all, and it wasn't too hard to figure out why the Chief would have made the trip out here.

She still shook her head, though. "We've already questioned him," she stated. "He's given us locations of bases and names of people. He's essentially useless now."

The Chief shook his head this time. "He gave up everything after a single night?"

Caitlyn sighed. "I know what you're thinking," she said. "It's all awfully suspicious. Unfortunately, we've been cornered here, with the press saying we can't get anything done and the Governor praising us for our first big find"

The Chief didn't say anything at first, letting his silence speak for him. The rain slowly picked up the pace, pattering against the window in an increasing stutter.

"Fine, you can speak to him," Caitlyn said, giving in. "But don't kill him, please. I don't need to be accused of police brutality. We have enough of that with Vi already."

The Chief nodded. The Sheriff got up with another sigh, and led the Chief out of the room. This time, the pair moved to the opposite side of the building before moving downwards. It was all new to the Chief, so he recorded it all with his helmet.

The staircase took them down to below ground level. It led into a dark metal hallway, with a featureless door at the end.

They waked up to it, the Chief noting the lack of guards in the area. It was odd for a prison to lack any form of security, but it had nothing to do with him, so he didn't care.

The sheriff put her hand to a little crystal globe mounted on the wall, pink light seeping through the gaps between her fingers. After a moment, the iron door clicked twice.

Caitlyn took her hand of the crystal and gestured inside. "The prisoner is in cell 12-C. I'll be waiting out here."

The Chief nodded and opened the door. He walked in, seeing the ranks of jail cells on either side of him. Not all of them were filled, and none of the people inside bothered calling out to the heavily armoured figure walking through.

The Chief noted turrets mounted on the ceilings, each one reminiscent of Heimerdinger's turrets. Several automatons walked the halls, too, but they appeared to be unarmed.

He turned several corridors, finding his way to block C. As soon as he turned the last corner, his assault rifle snapped up, tracking the man that stood in the dimly light hallway.

After a moment of hesitation, Chief lowered the weapon again. It wouldn't be good to fire an automatic weapon in here.

"Graves," he greeted. The person in question turned his head towards the Spartan, and grunted.

The Chief walked closer after noting the outlaw lacked any weapons. "I thought you had left town," the Spartan continued. "You should have."

Graves grunted again. "I nearly did, 'till this son of a bitch got

himself caught." He flicked his head towards the cell in front of him.

The Chief looked into the jail cell, seeing at once that it was the supposed 'Triad Leadership.'

"How did you get in?" The Chief asked Graves, still staring at the gangster who had yet to lift his head.

"It 'aint hard to break in â€" and out- o' places like dis."

The Chief nodded, and crouched down by the man in the jail cell.

"He won't say nothin'," Graves said gruffly. "Already tried. He's one of them guys that screwed me over, for sure, but he's as mute as a damango."

The Chief ignored the outlaw, focusing instead on the prisoner. "Why?" Chief asked.

He got no response. The man just sat there, unmoving and barely breathing. The Chief wasn't even sure he was alive.

The Chief turned his attention back to the Outlaw. "You knew him?"

"I jus' said that, didn't I?"

The Chief elaborated. "Was he someone to let anything slip?"

Graves tilted his head, thinking. "No," he said after a few moments. "The first to mock, second to bolt, last to speak."

The Chief nodded his head. "Then why did he give out information to the police?"

Graves grunted again, but this time it turned into a hacking cough. The Chief figured it would be from the chemicals in the cigars he seemed to be fond of. "I didn' know that," he said. "Thatâ€| doesn't seem like him."

Still the figure in the cell didn't shift.

Graves gave a sigh. "I wanted 'o kill 'im," he said. "But figured it would be better to watch him rot. At least for a little while."

The Chief looked at Graves, and gave an inaudible sigh. "You should leave," he said. "Before you're caught."

Graves stared at the figure for a long moment, and then nodded. "You're a good man, Spartan," he said, begging to walk away. "But I still 'aint forgiven you yet for that time on the rift."

The Chief tilted his head. He knew what time Graves was talking about: the time he had killed Graves' team with Graves' own ultimate.

The Chief stayed there for ten more minutes, watching the prisoner to absolutely nothing at all. After that he returned to Caitlyn, who sealed up the prison with another press of her hand.

"I'm guessing you did not learn anything useful," she said.

"I want permission to eliminate the Triad," the Chief said in a voice that made it seem more of a command than anything else.

"Wha-aaa-aa?" Caitlyn sputtered out.

The Chief did not answer, taking the lead when Caitlyn lagged behind.

"I can't allow you to do that," she said, going back into step with the Chief.

The Chief stared at her. "I can get it done quickly."

Caitlyn shook her head. "You may be a Champion, but you can't do that. And you can't stay in town indefinitely, either. Even Champions have a limit on how long they can stay."

The Chief didn't say anything. He allowed Caitlyn to lead him back to the front door, staying silent all the way.

"Chiefâ€¦ I want you to help, but I just can't allow it. Please, just let us handle it. Go back to the League, fight in some matches. We have this."

The Chief looked down at the sheriff and after a moments hesitation, he nodded. He opened the door, and went back out into the rain.

* * *

><p>The train station was full, people shuffling all around and calling out to each other before they left. The Chief wasn't doing any of that, of course. There was no one there that cared to see him leave.<p>

Steam and static electricity bled from the various chimneys scattered about the vehicle, adding to the foggy interior of the station. The Chief wasn't so sure that the static coming off of it was safe, but people didn't seem to care, so he didn't either.

He began to walk towards the train, where people were already boarding.

"Master Chief!" an eccentric voice called out from behind him.

The Chief turned, wondering what the revered inventor was doing here.

Heimerdinger ran up to the now stopped Chief, panting slightly, his wild hair even wilder. Several assistants in white lab coats trailed behind him, also panting.

"Iâ€¦ wanted to sayâ€¦ thatâ€¦" Heimerdinger stopped to catch his breath. "I just wanted to say that I have been drawing sketches up, and I think I would be able to recreate your technology!"

The Chief tilted his head. "â€¦And that was important enough to run

and inform me about?"

Heimerdinger nodded his head enthusiastically.

The Chief looked back to the train, then again at Heimer. "Can you repair the vehicles aboard the Dawn?"

Heimerdinger nodded again, as enthusiastic as before.

The Chief thought about it for a minute as the smoke from the train intensified. Did he want to allow the abhuman to mess with more human tech, and cause potentially more harm?

His first thought was no, but this was a situation that was different than he was used to. He had none of the advantages he was used to, while his as-of-yet unknown enemy was using weaponry that was better than what he had. It wasn't like he really had much of a choice, in the end.

"Okay," he said. "But keep it secret."

Heimerdinger, for the third time, nodded enthusiastically.

The Chief nodded, and turned towards the train.

It took him five more minutes to board, most of the people moving aside for him. Whether it was from his imposing presence or his status as a League Champion, he wasn't sure, but he didn't complain about it.

Once on the train he got into a cabin that seemed to be private. He kept his gear by his feet; content to stare out the window as the train slowly pulled out of the station, and continued to stare as the scenery changed. He was still staring, therefor, when the train stopped abruptly.

Naturally, the Chief bolted to his feet, hand on the gladius sheathed at his side. He could hear no sounds that indicated any fighting, but that could mean anything. He opened the sliding door that separated his cabin from the rest of the train and peered outside.

An attendants face stared right back at him. The Chief looked over the man, first ahead and then behind him. After checking that the coast was clear, he looked back to the attendant and asked, "Why is the train not moving?"

The attendant was far calmer than Chief expected. "Demacians, sir," she said. "New protocols have them searching anything that goes into their territory, including the train."

The Chief blinked under his helmet. "â€|Why?"

The attendant blinked, probably confused as to why she was being asked such a question. "They are paranoid about Noxiansâ€|I guessâ€|sir?"

The Chief nodded and slammed the sliding door closed. He returned to his seat and stared out the window again, watching the soldiers that only now came into view.

He opened his bag of gear and switched out his MA5C for the M392 Designated Marksman Rifle inside. He removed the magazine and pulled back the bolt to eject the round in the chamber. He put the 7.62 mm back inside the magazine and loaded it again, pushing the bolt forwards to chamber the round, before setting the rifle in his lap.

That was how the Master Chief sat, from the moment the Demacians began searching the train in earnest to the moment he arrived at the institute.

* * *

><p>And here's another chapter. Its not so long, but im happy I got one out. So, uh, thanks to the people who gave me checkpoint titles, because I have a couple more I can use now. Thanks.

And... that's pretty much it. Thanks for actually reading, guys. it means a hell of a lot, since I'm in the belief that this story sucks.

Wort?

24. Chapter 24

Chapter 23: Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

The Master Chief sat on plush couch located in his room inside of the Institute of war. He was in the process of re-assembling his M41 rocket launcher. While it didn't actually need maintenance, Chief did not have the luxury of test firing the thing while he was short on ammunition, and he really didn't want to risk a backfire either. So he just settled with making sure every inch of the weapon was meticulously swabbed clean.

It was boring work, even for him.

The Chief found it faintly amusing how ever since he arrived at the league, he was constantly bored. It just went to show how useless hyper-lethal vectors were without a war to fight. Well, technically the counted as fighting, but the Chief didn't really consider it as such. It was a war game, and all that did was keep him primed.

At least the excursion to Piltover had been interesting. Enough to cut the edge off of his boredom, at least. Even so, despite only being back for a single day, he was wishing he was out again.

He had visited the Summoners first thing upon arrival, letting them know of what had occurred in Piltover, but they had brushed it all off like they usually did. And apparently they were still having difficulties finding his home universe, but that was expected. The Chief was fairly certain by now that they were holding back. There wasn't anything he could do about that, though.

There was a _snick _as he slid rockets stock back into the metal casing. The M41, like most UNSC weapons, was fairly easy to take apart and put together. Most of the pieces fit neatly into place, all of them featuring some sort of magnetic rail system to keep things

together.

Hit motion sensor pinged blue, indicating someone in the hallway. He could hear the person's footsteps, too, and because the Chief was, well, himself, he could easily tell who it was. That was why when Riven stepped through the unlocked door he was finishing his launcher, not aiming his assault rifle at her head.

"Why does it look like a warzone in here?" The Exile wondered aloud, not expecting an answer from the green giant.

She was surprised when she got one.

"Home decorating," the Chief said, calmly fitting the bulky clasp that opened the barrels back into the frame.

Riven gave a muted huh noise before carefully entering the room, watching the Chief for any signs that he would pull out a weapon.

He just sat there, finishing up his launcher.

She took another step, still watching him.

Still sitting there with the massive firearm.

She took the last few steps and plopped down on the floor in front of the table.

The Chief ignored her, focusing on getting the rocket launcher assembled. If it was anyone else, he sure would not have allowed them to see how the rocket fit together, but he knew Riven had no political affiliations and the majority of the factions out there had something against her, so he considered this relatively safe.

He snapped the trigger and its guard back into place, and then began to re-assemble the device that allowed the M41 to lock onto targets.

Riven just sat there, head tilted, looking as if she wanted to start a conversation but didn't actually know what to say.

For the next few minutes, the only sound in the room was the clacking of firearm parts.

"You know," Riven said at last, "It's been weird not seeing you walking around the halls with that heavy armour of yours."

The Chief shrugged, uninterested. "I went out," he said.

"Yeah, I know that," Riven snorted out. "You could have said you were leaving, at least."

His armoured shoulders rose fractionally as he shrugged again. "I was unaware it mattered."

"You wereâ€¦" Riven blinked. "That makes no sense. You always tell your friends when you leave, so they don't worry."

The Chief stopped fitting pieces together for a single second before resuming. "Sorry," he said monotonely.

Riven shook her head, but didn't say anything further. Maybe she realized the Chief didn't enjoy the line of enquiry, or maybe she just got bored of it, but the Chief was grateful either way. Socializing still was not his strong suit.

Silence, with the exception of the snapping noise of the parts, descended on the room again.

Riven coughed. "Don't you get uncomfortable in all that armour?" she asked, trying to make some sort of conversation.

The Chief didn't answer.

"You know, isn't it heavy?" she elaborated.

The Chief shook his head, but his attention was still on the weapon. "Muscle fibre bundles, hydraulic pistons and servos make the armour easy to wear."

Riven let out an 'hm' noise as she tried to wrap her head around what the Spartan had told her. "So if it's easy to wearâ€¦ can I try your armour on?"

The last piece of the weapon, the rotating barrels, clunked into place. The Chief raised the weapon to his shoulder, testing the weight and heft again. He pressed the test button a couple of times, watching the barrels rotate smoothly each time.

"Easy for me," the Chief corrected, setting down the launcher. "Without my ceramic bone implants, you would be crushed flat. Boneless."

"Ah," Riven said a grimace on her face. The Chief assumed that she did not enjoy the prospect of being turned into a pancake. "How 'bout I just try the helmet on?"

"No," the Chief said. "Classified."

It was the easiest thing for him to say in this situation. She probably would be able to take the weight of the helmet (Maybe), but the Chief was anxious to avoid that. Even if it was by accident, there was a chance that she would see something that she was not authorized to see.

Not that it really mattered, seeing as how his unknown enemy possibly had the _dawn's _databaseâ€¦ but still, this was something he wouldn't do.

"â€¦Okay?" Riven said, obviously not buying the excuse.

Since the Chief was finished with the Launcher, he sat immobile on the sofa, staring at Riven. Riven was less than comfortable with his, so she began to fidget with even the smallest things.

"Ahâ€¦ soâ€¦ are you going out for the harrowing?" She asked, scratching the back of her head in what the Chief was coming to realize was a nervous habit.

"Harrowing?" Chief asked, his voice just slightly changing from its

usual monotone.

"You don'tâ€¦ Well, the harrowing is kind ofâ€¦ It's likeâ€¦ uhâ€¦," Riven paused, searching for the right words. "Well, it's kind of hard for me to explain. I don't really understand it myself, soâ€¦"

The Chief rose up suddenly. He grabbed his sword and magnum from where he had set them down and sheathed them before moving towards the door.

Riven blinked and then frowned. "Where'r you going?"

"To find out what this 'harrowing' is."

* * *

><p>As it turned out, it was a lot harder to find out what the harrowing was than the Chief had initially assumed. Out of the five champions, six aids, and two Summoners he had talked to, he had received thirteen different explanations. Most of them were unrealistic, too, which was starting to irritate the Chief.<p>

Riven had parted ways with him some time ago, saying that she had a previous appointment with Irelia â€" whoever that was. The Chief found himself somewhat sad that he was wandering by himself again, but didn't pay the emotion much heed. His feelings were irrelevant.

He wandered about the hallways on the ground floor, the light entering through the sloping windows causing the white marble floor to shine. The Chief had to polarize his visor slightly to compensate.

Eventually he wandered into one of the park spaces of the league. The green grass shifted slightly in the breeze.

The Chief glanced over the park, trying to find a familiar face. There were none.

"Ah, Spartan. What brings you out here?" A grinding, melodic voice asked.

The Chief turned around too look at Thresh. The warden was a specter, a creature without true mass, and so he did not appear on the Chief's motion sensor â€" as the Chief had learned on the rift several times. Thresh was one of the champions that the Chief frequently was paired with and against.

The Chief tilted his head in greeting, but didn't say anything.

The specter laughed. "So silent for one so young â€" tell me, what is it that burdens your soul?"

Chief turned away. Thresh's words, as always, bothered him. They tended to be laden with obscure meanings and references that he could not understand, and not understanding something was one step away from admitting defeat. And he didn't lose.

"I'm trying to figure out what the harrowing is," Chief responded. Staying silent around the ghost never really worked.

"Ah, the harrowing," Thresh hummed. "Such a glorious time of festivities and the spilling of souls."

The Chief blinked. "Spilling of souls?"

Thresh nodded. "People go around sharing gifts of sweets with one another, dressing up so they can scare the evil spirits away â€" not knowing that the spirits cannot be scared away. And the souls they claim; such lovely screams they makeâ€|"

"â€|I see."

"Ah, but you do not. Or rather, you understand without knowing. The black mist claims what it must, for the shadows always hunger. The festivities do no work where there is not genuine energy to repel the mist â€" and it is difficult to repel."

The Chief stared at the chain warden, wondering briefly why it looked so happy while talking about souls being claimed.

"Can I kill it?" The Chief asked, somewhat predictably.

Thresh tilted its head. "Can darkness ever be slain?"

The Chief did not respond to the question. The answer was painfully obvious.

"Ah, 117, you take this too seriously. Give candy out to your friends, enjoy the festivities. The darkness I speak of has never reached this place â€" I jest at your expense." Thresh began to laugh.

The Chief stood still, silent, until Thresh moved away. He was a quarter thinking about how to defend himself and quarter feeling silly at what he had just heard, and half thinking about what candy to get.

* * *

><p>The next night

Riven heard the knock at the door, and it startled her. She was unused to having visitors, especially ones that knocked, so it was surprising enough for her to have dropped the remote that controlled the hextech television. Not that the darned thing ever worked â€" static just played across every channel.

She opened the door without bothering to ask who it was. Most assassins didn't knock anyways.

It was the Master Chief.

She raised a white eyebrow, a little bit confused. "Sup?"

The Chief tossed something, and instinctively she caught it before acknowledging what it was.

She looked at her palm and stared at the bundle of chocolates now in it. She looked abck up at the Chief, her second eyebrow raised.

The Chief shrugged and stepped back out into the hallway.

Riven smiled as she popped one of the chocolates in her mouth, the sweet thing melting on her tongue.

"So, what are you going out as?" She asked, closing the door and stepping outside with the Chief.

"A Spartan," the Master Chief stated, which earned a smile from the Exile.

"Fine, then," she said. "But don't scare everyone else away- I want sweets."

* * *

><p>Eh... really sorry, guys, but this weeks been hell for me. Ignoring homework, my computer actually blew up. Or rather, one of the RAM chips decided to spontaneously combust, but it had the same effect. SO, for the last few day I have no access to my computer, and when I finally repaired it I had to do three assignments and get a chapter out. So I sincerely apologize for no uploading sooner. If I believed in fate, I would say someone really doesn't want me writing this story...

Anyways, I know the Chapter is short and kinda weak, but its better than nothing, I would assume. I'm halfway done another chapter, so expect it out soon.

Peace.

25. Chapter 25

Chapter 24 - Delusions and Grandeur

"Just try it, at least."

It had been a week since the Chiefs return to the Institute of War, and a couple of days back for the person he was currently sitting with. True to the High Councillors word, her Summoners had been too busy to attempt any serious effort into locating the Chief's home, so he was stuck here for the foreseeable future. He'd been trying to make the best of it, learning champions names and being less cold than usual. Not that he liked it.

He had ended up going into town to purchase a replacement for his knife. While he did not really need it, he wanted to an excuse to get out of the Institute for a bit. And there was no such thing as having too many weapons, after all.

Naturally, as soon as the Chief left the shop, he was ambushed by a familiar mass of pink hair, because for some reason no one wanted to leave him alone. After much insistence by Vi, he was led to a shady bar so they could 'talk'.

And now she was trying to get him to drink alcohol. While he could, because he was technically of duty, he thought it was a bad habit to get into.

"No," the Chief said once again. Vi sighed exaggeratedly and brought his mug closer towards her.

"More for me," she declared, draining her own beverage. She set it down with a bang and wiped her mouth with her hand.

The Chief glanced around the bar, taking in the other patrons. It as evening time, so the more scummy ones were begging to come out. How they avoided the city guards, he would never know.

Although, maybe the guards didn't care about that kind of thing. This was not the UNSC, after all.

"So." Chief turned his attention back to Vi. She gave a smirk. "When're you gunna ask Riven out?"

For once, the Chief could not maintain his neutral face. His eyes widened slightly and he leaned forward a bit, incredulous. The question had caught him completely off guard.

"What?" he sputtered out, barely managed the words.

"Oh, c'mon. we all know you have a thing for her."

The Chief found his trained, military posture rapidly deteriorate. "No."

"No one spends that time together and aren't a thing."

"We. Are. NOT. A. Thing."

Vi chuckled. "Well, you had me fooled. In fact, you had most of the institute fooled."

The Chief sat back and gritted his teeth slightly. "I need allies," he said. "Nothing more."

He couldn't understand why Vi was getting on his nerves. It wasn't like him to get angry. Then again, it wasn't like him to travel to different dimensions, either.

"And it sure is nice when those 'allies' have benefits, am I right?"

The Chief blinked. "I don't understand," he said, truthfully. Many civilian terms were unknown to him, and those he did know he could not grasp the meaning of. It would be so much simpler if everyone used military talk and hand signs.

It was Vi's turn to blink. "Iâ€| youâ€| forget it."

They sat in an awkward silence. Well, awkward for Vi. Chief didn't really care one way or another if they talked or not.

"Chief," she said hesitantly. "Ya know it's okay to get attached, right? You're not in the military anymore."

"Attachment is a tactical weakness," he stated. Those were words that had been imprinted in his mind from a young age.

Vi snorted. "Yeah, right." She reached forward and gripped the Chief's hand in an arm lock pose. "Attachment makes you strong. Soldiers fight harder when there's something to fight _for. _If they have good enough reason, they'll dive into the infested pits of the void itself."

It was her choice of words that triggered the memory. Him, fighting thorough a horde of flood creatures in the infested hulk of High Charity to rescue Cortana. Despite overwhelming evidence that she had been infected, Hood had allowed him to go. Why had he gone? There was a good chance she would have been no help whatsoever. It went beyond the promise that he had made her. And why had Hood allowed him to go? He didn't even think it was worth it. And why had the Arbiter come to save him? Half-Jaw had stated that the Arbiter was too precious to risk boarding the hulk of High Charity.

He was shaken out of his memory when Vi let go of his hand to sip her " his " drink. "You know," she said, "you're hands 'r softer than I expected."

The Chief blinked again. He still didn't understand why or how civilians changed topics constantly.

Military talk would be so much easier.

He thought about it for a moment. "Gauntlets," he stated. Looking at his hand and flexing it. "I have not held a weapon in my real hands for over twenty-five years of war." Truthfully, it was probably the cause of the armours gel-layer, but he didn't mention the whole gel layer stuff to Vi " it would probably just have confused her. Or maybe not; she was pretty tech-savvy.

Vi shook her head. She still hadn't grasped the concept of such a war. While she thought fighting was fun, she couldn't image fighting for that long. Anyone would be exhausted half way through that.

Chief glanced around the shady room, which was slowly filling up with more patrons. He reached a hand to his face, only to find that he was sweating, which was odd. His enhanced body made sweating " except in the most extreme of circumstances " impossible.

Maybe the memory had more of an impact him than he had realized.

"I'm going to use the restroom," he declared, and rose up, not waiting for a response back.

The restroom was, naturally, a shithole. The no longer white tiles were cracked and ripped from the walls. The glass above the sink was shattered, as if someone's head had gone through it, and the floor was broken as if by heavy footsteps.

All in all, it was still better than all the places the Covenant had visited.

He went to wash his face, uncaring of the cracked and dirty porcelain sink. His enhanced immune system would block out small diseases.

As the water ran between his hands, he looked at his reflection in the cracked mirror. His face was pale, his hair still uncut. The crack ran down the middle of his face, making the two halves appear unaligned with each other. He knew that if Vi were here to see it, she would have made a connection between it and something regarding his current state of mind.

He chuckled in his mind, but the sound never made it to his throat. He wondered about Vi, for a minute. She was the least likely person out of the limited group of people that he knew to give him life advice, but here she was, doing that. It was odd, in a way; yet in another way it made more sense than anything else.

This time his chuckle left his throat.

After several more long minutes, he turned away and left the room, feeling slightly more refreshed. Of course, that feeling didn't last very long.

Vi was sitting at the table, cradling her drink, her face a bright, angry red colour. There was a man sitting beside her in the booth, and two more standing beside the table. Chief had been gone for less than five minutes and already people were harassing her.

"Get away if you like your face," she said through clenched teeth. Or maybe it was a smile. The Chief couldn't tell one way or another.

He moved towards the table, knowing that Vi would do something rash and hoping to avoid it.

"C'mon, sweetie. Don't be like that. Me 'n the boys just wan' keep you company," said the man beside her, leaning in far too much.

Vi punched the man in the face.

He fell back, clutching his now broken nose. "You BITCH!" he cried, blood dripping between his fingers. The other two men moved to their downed leader, glaring menacingly at Vi.

"You're gunna pay," said the taller of the two.

"No one's going to be paying anyone," the Chief said, suddenly right behind the two men.

They had to crane their necks up to look at him, for he was a head and a half taller than the both of them. They were both pretty short men, after all.

"And just who the hell do you think you are?" said the shorter of the two, moving his coat back to show a gun strapped to his waist.

Less than a second later, the Master Chief had his knife out and pointed at the man's throat. His eyes crossed as he tried to stare at the blade so dangerously close to him.

"A Demon," said Chief with a small, wry grin. All three of the men paled, thinking that it was quite possibly true.

The room went silent, everyone staring at the development in their midst. This was probably the night's entertainment for them.

"We were just leaving, you know," said the leader, who was still on the floor. His two compatriots nodded their heads vigorously. Well the shorter one tried to, at least. It was hard with a knife at his throat.

The Chief let a tense few seconds go by before sheathing his knife. "Go," he commanded, and all three men scrambled away, shooting dirty looks back at them.

"Demon," chuckled Vi. "Nice touch."

The Chief shrugged his shoulders. "That's what my enemies used to call me."

Vi chuckled even more at that, and the Chief allowed himself to smile too.

"Why didn't you just tell them you're a league champ?" he asked. "They would have left you alone."

Vi drank the rest of the alcohol. "I like to fight my own battles," she said. "Plus, if they didn't recognize me right off the bat, what makes you think they would have believed me anyways?"

The Chief shrugged again.

"You know I could have handled myself, right?"

The Chief nodded. "I'm sure. I just lessened the casualties." He looked towards the door.

Vi followed his gaze. "Wanna go?" she asked.

The Chief nodded. "Bars don't seem to agree with me," he said.

Vi chuckled again, but didn't protest. A few minutes later they were walking down the road, headed back to the institute.

"What was the point of the conversation?" asked Chief. He hated spending his time doing nothing of value.

"Do friends need a reason to hang out with each other?" Vi shot back, seeming quite serious. She didn't look at the Chief, so she was unable to see his reaction of complete shock.

He actually had to stop for a moment. He didn't recall, at any point, even acting remotely friend-like to her. In fact, he had punched her. And she still considered him a friend? Without any commitment on his part?

Was that how this worked?

Vi turned back. "What are you doing? Tired yourself out already?" she snorted. Chief assumed from her tone that she was amused. At what, he didn't know.

He moved up to join her, and they resumed walking in silence.

"For a guy that isn't looking for a relationship, you sure do hang

out with a lot of females," Vi said, out of the blue.

The Chief just shook his head and sighed. "Coincidence," he replied.

"Maybe your subconsciously looking for â€" "

"No," he said. "And please stop trying to psycho-analyze me."

"Oh yeah, Tin Man? Make me."

Chief glanced at her sidelong. "Ok. I'll call the Sheriff over here and she can see how tough and un-caring you really are."

Vi opened and closed her mouth a few times like a fish, then turned a bright red. She mumbled under her breath a bit.

They walked on for a few more steps in silence before Vi said, "Just because I'm trying to help you doesn't mean I'm soft. And my gir- my partner doesn't have to know about this."

"Agreed."

They reached the main plaza, recently rebuilt after the devastation from a couple of weeks before. Against the objection of the Chief, the automatons had been carried away and destroyed. The human bodies had gotten funerals. It would have made a lot more sense to keep the automatons for future study, but apparently League officials cared more about feelings than tactical advantages.

"Alright, I still have some shit to do. I trust you can make it back to the League without causing a war?"

The Chief smiled a small smile, nodding.

"C ya," she said, walking away backwards. "And ask her out, you big metal can."

The Master Chief shook his head and scowled, but he watched her leave anyways, making sure she was okay.

* * *

><p> Elsewhere

"I want to make sure you are ready and committed to what is to come."

Marin nodded, annoyed that his employer even had to ask. He had signed the contract, had he not?

"Good," the Scientist said. "We shall be like a storm, descending upon Runterra, as unstoppable as the elements themselves."

Marin tilted his head slightly, enough to make his next statement seem like a question. "I except that you will adhere to the terms of my contract?"

The Scientist smiled coolly. "Of course," he said smoothly. "Innocents that do not get in our way will not be harmed. Your honour

will not be stained."

Marin nodded content. While the question he had asked may have been a little bit redundant, he liked to be sure "one of the few things he had in common with his employer."

He stood in the room, waiting for dismissal. The Scientist had other plans, though. He stood up. "Come with me."

Marin followed his employer through a door at the back of the office. It took them to another metal walkway, similar to the entrance to the lab, but this one was above a far, far larger room. It was cavernous; it stretched out farther than he could see in either direction. There were lines upon lines of the new-model mechs and more besides. Massive four legged walker mechs, ground vehicles, air vehicles, and augmented humans that Marin himself had supervised the creation of. Everything was assembled into blocks, companies of troops, each a piece of the larger battle force.

It was an army large enough to threaten any of the city-states of Valoran. He turned to stare at his employer.

"This is just the vanguard army," the Scientist said. "My factories can now produce this many troops per week, thanks to this." He patted the odd device that had helped him propel his research forward. "And I already have another army nearing completion. And as soon as we complete our major objectives, I can create this many troops per day."

Marin was impressed. He even whistled appreciatively.

"No longer will humanity loose hundreds of troops in each war. Automaton are the next step in warfare. We can what my former employers never had the balls to do "rule this world."

The Scientists voice practically dripped with venom. Marin only knew little of his employer's former work "something about sentient mechs and necromancy. All he really knew was that his former employers had had him rebuild one of their favoured soldiers with his technology, but they were unwilling to take the next step they needed to rule the world, like the Scientist had told them to do. They did not trust untested and relatively new Techmaturgy, despite its obvious effectiveness.

Dangerous, they called it.

He wanted to prove them wrong. He would prove them wrong.

Marin was distracted from his thoughts by a blue, holographic light coming from the machine. It depicted all the forces he would have at his command "a fraction of the army assembled below him.

"Are you sure that is enough?" he inquired.

The Scientist nodded. "Yes. The rest of the troops are needed elsewhere."

Marin nodded. He already knew the battle plan. After all, he had helped devise it. It would keep the enemy on their toes and jumping at every shadow in the dark, spreading their forces thin.

Below was the noise of squealing, tortured metal. The far, massive bar doors were slowly opening, revealing the monstrosity within. With pounding jabs it moved forwards, each one of its steps marking the floor and propelling its massive metal bulk towards the center of the battle lines. Despite the machine being so massive, it nimbly avoided the automatons beneath its feet.

As it growled to a stop, its main weapons began to glow a sickly green colour.

"Now," the Scientist said. "Now."

* * *

><p>Finally I get to the point where I can get the ball rolling. Maybe I was too eager for it and rushed this chapter out, but Meh. I guess i should just say: Dun worry there is still a lot to go before this story is finished, because i've gotten some messages or pm's (We their called) about when the story is ending and if I can make it longer. Or something.**

So, uh, review if you feel like it. Everything allows me to write too a higher quality. If not, then enjoy the.. week?

26. Chapter 26

Chapter 25 - About to have our hands full

The Master Chief was leaning against the tree in a classic breach position with the samurai Yasuo across from him, in a similar pose. Both of them were staring at the bush that marked the entrance to the jungle. Just ahead was red buff, where a scattered team fight was currently being waged.

The other three members of the Chief's team had been lured away into the jungle and were each currently engaged in a small fight of their own. The Chief could see on his mini-map that the enemy team was slowly boxing in his team, and there was no way they would win a 3v5.

The tree creaked as his weight became too much to bear.

He looked to Yasuo, and tried to give him the simplest hand signals he could manage. While it was perfectly safe to speak over team chat, old habits die hard. He motioned to the both of them, held up three fingers, then pointed towards the bush. Yasuo nodded, hopefully in understanding.

He began to count down with his fingers. Three, two, one.

They charged in the bush at the same moment, and were greeted by the sight of the moon warrior fighting Viktor. Yasuo quickly used his wind technique to dash between the two and took a blast of magic for his teammate, his personal wind shield absorbing the blow and carrying it away.

She raised her sword, about to slash at Yasuo while he was busy maintaining his wind shield, but the Chief was already beside her.

She struggled for a moment, her arm trying to descend while in the Chief's grip. She looked at him, and then snarled. She spun around, ripping her arm free, and tried to retreat.

He raised his assault rifle and fired it in bursts, but each shot was deflected by hastily summoned spheres that orbited her body. He tossed his rifle down and ran forwards again, this time with his blade drawn.

His blade met the enemies with the clash of steel on steel. He gestured back to his teammates, indicating that they leave and help the others.

The warrior blasted the Chief with magic and he tried to disengage, but was drawn back in by a surge of potent energy. His opponent quickly dashed in, body slamming him and popping his shield with the magical discharge. The Chief grimaced and ducked under her next blow, allowing his enemy to stumble forward a few steps. She turned, but wasn't quick enough to stop the Chief from slashing downwards, his blow cleaving through her chest plate in a bright flash of blue light.

****THE MASTER CHIEF HAS SLAIN DIANA****

He didn't have time to rest. He ran back to where his assault rifle lay and grabbed it, reloading it even as he moved forwards towards his team.

Yasuo and Viktor were already helping out Graves, effectively making the fight a 3V3. Chief was confident that they could hold their own, so he made his way towards Thresh, the member of their team farthest from the fighting.

He glanced down at his motion sensor, but all it picked up was a bit of static and the blue dots indicating his team. The fog of war really did play havoc with his systems.

Chief crashed through a bush, seeing the enemy's base wall just ahead of him. He turned sharply to his left, AR at the ready, and saw Thresh, who appeared to be heavily wounded.

Which meant that to his left was â€

His motion sensor pinged a warning sound just as he felt something slam into him from the side, and found himself unable to move. Several more blows struck him, but he weathered it, waiting for the stun to pass. As soon as it did he punched with all his strength, intent on giving himself some room to bring his ranged weapons to bear.

His fist hit something relatively soft and he thought he heard something snap as his opponent was flung away from him.

His enemy was determined and got right back up. The Chief raised his rifle before realizing he was staring straight at the Exile. She smiled at him in a particularly fearsome manner.

He fired as she dashed towards him.

All of his bullets rebounded off some sort of runic shield around her

body. She swung at him, but the blow was blocked by a powerful shield that had just appeared around him. He glanced at his feet and saw a lantern, which he grabbed as fast as he could. He was pulled back towards Thresh, leaving a stunned Riven behind.

"Thanks," he said, grateful for the extra range.

The spectral being just nodded, winding his Scythe up. Chief shook his head. "Go to the team," he said. "They need you more."

Thresh looked at him with his head tilted. "Okay. Save her soul for me."

Chief didn't watch him leave, but grumbled in disapprove of his statement. He began to fire full-auto on Riven again, and this time the bullets connected with her body in small but bright flashes of light.

She continued to run forwards, undeterred, until Chief landed a shot between her eyes and she fell forwards, unmoving.

He frowned. Was she dead? No, her body would have been claimed by light if she had. He raised his rifle to her, his reticule flashing red as it settled on her head.

He didn't fire.

After a moment, he blinked away the flashing signs and lowered the weapon.

What are you doing? Asked the Chief's summoner.

_She is unable to finish this fight. She is harmless, _he responded.

He remembered, a long time ago, going through his first exercise with Cortana. Cortana had questioned him as to why he did not kill his opponents, which would have been quicker than disabling them. He had told her that they were no threat in their disabled state, and the UNSC would need every soldier they had for the coming war.

He turned around, making his way back to his team. If he could finish the rest of the enemy team off, they could do Baron and win this game. It had gone on for too long already.

There was a flash of green light behind him.

He spun around, reflexes taking over. Targeting signals appeared all around his visor, each one centered on Riven. She was dashing towards him, her blade restored to its full length, energy crackling.

The Chief fired everything on full auto, every one of the armour piercing rounds causing tons of damage.

As soon as she was in range she swung clumsily, the blow never making it to the Chief. He fired at her with one hand, the other grabbing something from his belt, oblivious to the buildup of energy.

The flashing green wave hit him with a force akin to being hit by a wraith tank, tearing through his armour like tissue paper. It bit

into his skin and blue light flashed from his wounds, each one signaling his imminent death. He fell the ground, unable to stand on his crushed legs.

Riven was close to him now, exhausted, but looking at him withâ€|Concern? Worry? Relief?

He gave a small beneath his helm as he understood his mistake. He should have realized her Summoner would have brought heal along.

Oh well. His fault for leaving himself open.

This was a game, after all.

His thumb left the activation panel of the plasma grenade, and it glowed a bright, sickly blue.

"Catch."

****MASTER CHIEF HAS RIVEN****

****RIVEN HAS SLAIN THE MASTER CHIEF****

* * *

><p>The rest of the group was laughing at some event that had happened to the Samurai on his travels. The Chief didn't join in, but only because he didn't understand what was so comedic about it. He would have joined in if he did.<p>

They were all walking to a restaurant in town. Originally they had all intended to go to the cafeteria, as usual for League Champs, but Graves had convinced them all otherwise. Viktor, their mid laner, and Thresh, their support, had both decided not join them on account of not needing to actually consume food.

Chief, in a rare display of care, decided that it would be a good idea to invite the enemy team along, too, since they put up such a good fight. The game had been very close, and the Chief was a strong believer in respecting ones opponents. Despite that being a very odd thing to do, the rest of his team had agreed nonetheless.

They arrived at the restaurant, a wooden building that was vaguely Romanesque. The Chief still found it odd how so many things here resembled things from his own universe.

"Table for eight, please," said Karma once they reached the front. The waitress nodded furiously, obviously awed in the presence of so many famous Champions. She grabbed a stack of menus and led them to a long table in the center of the room.

While the Chief found the location of the table compromising from a tactical perspective, he decided not to say anything. It was just lunch, after all.

Everybody in the room turned their heads to stare at the Champions passing through.

"Hello everyone!" cried out Fizz in joy. Out of the entire group, he was enjoying the attention they were getting the most.

"That's the Tidal Trickster. Heard he's from under the oceanâ€|"

"That's Karma, over thereâ€|" "The one from Ionia?"

"The way the outlaw looks at you sends shivers through my spineâ€|"

"Is that a Noxian? Don't see many of them 'roun hereâ€|"

"Is that the new Champ? Heard he's toughâ€|"

"Rumor is he's a robotâ€|" "Like Blitz?"

"Glad he's on our sideâ€|"

They all sat down at the table, ignoring the sounds of the other patrons. Chief found himself, quite by accident, sitting beside Riven.

He removed his helmet, much to the amusement of everyone else. They could all see the displeasure on his face.

"Not used to so many people, are you?" asked Jayce. The Chief shook his head.

"Well I love it!" exclaimed Fizz, who was bouncing in his seat.

The Chief picked up his menu and buried his face in it, trying to ignore the rest of the group. The menu had a wide variety of foods, almost five pages in total. The food was organized into sections, but even so, the Master Chief had trouble picking something. It was so much easier back in the UNSC when all he got to eat was nutrient-rich gruel. Once choice covering all his nutritional needs.

He wasn't the only one.

"I have no idea what to get," Riven whispered. He glanced around to see to whom her question was directed.

It was him.

He hesitated, unsure of what she wanted him to say. "Iâ€| Thought you said you eat out a lot?"

"Well yeah," she said in her classically quiet voice. "But I've never eaten somewhere so _expensive._"

He shrugged, looking at the prices. He really couldn't tell if this stuff was considered costly or not.

"How about this?" he asked, knowing Riven enjoyed meat sandwiches. She leaned over to look at what he was pointing at, biting her lip thoughtfully. Someone at the table sniggered.

After a few more moments of looking, she nodded, content with the suggestion. The Chief then flipped through the pages, deciding that a nice piece of meat or five would do great.

The Master Chief heard something, then. It was faint, like a whistling. Like the wind chimes Janna liked to keep outside her room. He wanted to say it sounded familiar, but he could not figure out why.

The sound was quickly masked by the sound of approaching footsteps.

"What can I start you all off with? Drinks?" The newly-arrived waiter asked, running his free hand through his hair. He seemed to be making a great effort to look calm.

Graves, the self-appointed leader of the group, looked around the table. "I think we can order everything now," he said. The waiter pulled a pencil out of his pocket and poised it against a blank page in his notebook.

"Excellent," he said, and looked over the group expectantly.

Graves, again, spoke first. "To drink, I'll have aâ€¦"

That was as far as he got.

The rockets smashed into the roof of the building at that exact moment, detonating with explosive â€"and deadly- force.

* * *

><p>Right. This Chapter is really short, but only because it was originally part of the next chapter, but I thought that there were too many themes going on so I separated them. The next chapter will be out soon, and hopefully it'll make up for this one. Hopefully.

**So the UNSC and Covenant are probably not showing up in this, only because that would be OP. How does anyone on runeterra fight that? Magic against Covenant flagship?
>

And lastly, there was a comment I received about grammar that I wanted to thank the said person very much for. That extremely helpful. Really helps me out.

It also wanted me to clarify something, though. Maybe I should have said this at the start of the story, but... w/e. English is not my first language, and I try to write things to the best of my ability. I'm also going through my Computer Programming course, which is what I'm studying for, and if you've programmed before, you know how time-consuming it can be. (Novels worth of code) Oh, and that's on top of other weird assignments. (Math essays?）

So yeah, I don't have much time to review my own stuff. I'm actually surprised I still manage to update weekly.

**Oh, and maybe I should apologize for not using ['s] at the end of [Chief], but it's a word that doesn't actually need it. (according to the English prof I asked.) And the term 'Master Chief' is meant to apply to one individual person. While some militaries have several master chiefs, it is a term that is still treated as only having one possible recipient. (Is recipient the word?) So it does not require a

possessive apostrophe. Its just THE Master Chief, not A Master Chief.

>

**So, ignoring my rant, hope you guys enjoyed this... installment.
The next chapter will be out relatively soon.**

27. Chapter 27

Chapter 26 - Shut up and get behind me... Sir.

There was a whining in his ears. His head felt like it was about to split open. There was screaming, lots of it.

The Master Chief looked around the room from his position on the floor. Tables were overturned, an entire section of the building had collapsed, and there were bodies strewn across the ground.

_An attack, _he thought. _Move. Fight._

He crawled forward for his helmet, which had been tossed several meters away. He put it on as soon as he reached it, calming down only when he heard the gentle hiss of its locking mechanisms close.

He looked up at the hole in the ceiling through his now tinted blue vision, and realized there was no immediate danger. It was a long ranged attack, nothing more.

"Riven," he said, almost subconsciously. He began to look around frantically, remembering that she had been right beside and therefore closest to the center of the impact. At least, he assumed he was the center of the impact. All the evidence " the destroyed room-pointed to it.

He located the other members of his group easily enough. They all appeared battered, bruised, but unharmed. Alive.

Riven.

He spotted a tan leg sticking out from under a pile of rubble. He began to shift away the largest pieces, throwing them away haphazardly. It didn't take him much time to uncover her form.

"Hi," she said, sounding completely out of place.

"Are you okay?" Chief asked. While she appeared to be unharmed, no one here was connected to his bio-readouts, so he wanted to make sure.

"Yeah," she said. "Just really sore."

The Chief nodded and turned his attention back to the others who were already getting back on their feet.

"Clear her out and help the rest of the civilians," he ordered. He grabbed the assault rifle that he had, fortunately, decided to bring. Everyone else had left their weapons at the Institute.

"What are you going to do?" asked Karma, the first to recover. Her

innate magic was useful in situations such as this.

"I'm going to kill the people that did this," he said, accentuating it with the sound of a magazine sliding into his MA5C.

He didn't wait for a response. He leaped out of the gap in the wall and began to run towards the League.

Already he could see that fighting had engulfed the areas closer to the Institute. There was fire and smoke, and was pretty sure he saw flying objects - enemy gunships - in the smoke. It would explain the speed of the attack, at least.

He moved fast, passing civilians who were fleeing the hardest hit areas. Luckily the restaurant had been relatively close to the Institute of War, so he made it there fairly quickly. Naturally, that was only the easy part.

There was fighting all over the main entrance. Champions and city guards were combating Mechs, similar to the ones he had fought before, but undoubtable upgraded. Before they had reminded him of shambling skeleton elites, but these ones resembled fully armoured Elite rangers. Their head encompassing visor was a bright, lime green colour, standing out against the dull, matte black metal of their bodies. Several parts of their armour floated above their bodies, static discharging between the two. The humps on their backs seemed to be large crystals, lines of magical energy running from it to the body. They looked deadly.

Worse yet, in the middle of his few dozen enemies was a truck of some sort. It seemed like a cross between a transport warthog and a revenant, but was built like the carriage he had rode in on so long ago. It lacked wheels, instead hovering on pulsing energy which seemed to be coming from generators mounted on the sides. Oddly enough, the generators looked like ghost gravity vanes turned sideways. One of the Mechs was standing behind the vehicles turret, firing blasts of potent plasmic energy at the opposition.

The Chief knew there were no ghosts on the Dawn for them to study, and there definitely were no schematics of one either. Where had they gotten the tech?

The Chief switched his rifle to single fire, took aim at the turret-gunners head, and fired. He counted every shot it took to bring one down. The Mech swung the turret around, spraying wildly, unable to locate its target.

5 for the head.

Content that the vehicle was no longer a threat, the Chief switched back to full auto and proceeded to gun down the other Mechs. They weren't going to go down without a fight, however, and they began to return fire on the Master Chief. He ducked to the left and took cover behind a fallen marble pillar. Each shot that hit it burned away some of the precious material.

The people defending the entrance seemed to realize that they were no longer the focus of the attack, and they began to renew their assault. Magical blasts took out sections of the Mech line, bullets hitting weak points in their armour and blades severing their heads

from their bodies.

The Chief took advantage of the change in the situation and vaulted over the fallen pillar, presenting his left shoulder to the enemy as he hip fired his assault rifle and charged. His rounds cut down two of them before his weapon clicked dry. He ran a few more steps than he tackled down another of the mechanical rangers, crushing its metal skull with the butte of his rifle. He rose up in a crouch, swiftly reloading, only to realize that the rest of the rangers were falling back down the street.

The Chief blink-clicked away the targeting symbols and ran up the stairs of the Institutes main entrance. There were city guards crowded around them " about fifteen in all " and six champions, only three of which he recognized.

He moved towards the three, Thresh looking unsurprised at his appearance, Fortune looking shocked, and Tryndamere looking annoyed.

"What happened?" Chief asked. He needed all the information he could get if he was to repel the attack.

Fortune looked angry. "How the fuck 'm I supposed to know?" she shouted, waving her pistols around. "These _things _showed up outta nowhere!"

The Chief looked at Thresh, the calmest of the three. "I don't know," the specter said. "We heard loud noises and ran out here, but were held up by a boxy flying thing that shot at us. It dropped the automobile off over there and the enemies we just killed."

"Was there just one" boxy" flying" thing?"

"One here, but we saw two or three others fly over," said Miss Fortune, finally contributing something useful.

The Chief nodded and looked up. They were probably dropping troops on the roof; it was what he would do.

He looked back down the street where the enemies were surely regrouping. He turned back to Thresh. "Have the guards take cover behinds the rubble. Anyone with guns aims for the head, anyone with a blade is the last line of defense. Fortune, you keep to cover and lay down as many shots as you can."

He turned to Tryndamere, who was still looking annoyed. "Make your way around the ruins over there. Thresh, stay close to him. When the majority of their line has passed by, go in and take as many as you can out. Thresh, use your lantern to pull him out when it gets too hot."

Both of them nodded, Tryndamere looking less than pleased but unable to offer anything better.

The Chief moved forwards, entering the massive building. The large lobby that was usually bustling with people was empty, but in the distant halls he could hear the sounds of fighting, the sound of people dying. Clearly enemy troops had breached the building.

He walked through the corridors with his assault rifle raised, ready for combat, but everything seemed deserted. He found that odd, seeing as how this place had several hundred people living in residence.

He rounded the fourth corridor, seeing two champions " Zed and Syndra " fighting a small group of automatons.

The Chief ran forwards, unwilling to fire his weapon while there was a chance of hitting the Champions.

The closest mech reacted first, turning with its gun-arm raised and ready to fire upon the Spartan.

The Chief slapped the creature aside, the force of the blow splintering its metal carapace and sending it into the wall.

The other four were momentarily distracted by the new hostile in their area, allowing Zed and Syndra to quickly cut down two of their number. The rest resumed fighting, and lasted for another three seconds before the Chief had put them out of commission.

Syndra didn't say anything, just tilting her head in a manner that could have been a nervous tick or a nod of thanks. Zed, on the other hand, verbally said his thanks.

"Where is everyone else?" the Chief asked, scanning the corridors with his primary firearm raised.

Zed shrugged. "Many were in League matches," he said. "Today are the playoff games, remember? They would still be stuck in the matches, if the Summoners did not have time to summon them back. And that means"

"And anyone that wasn't in the matches would be in the bar," Chief finished.

Zed nodded.

Chief began to move again. "Both of you, meet up with surviving Champions and push into the building. I'm going to free the Champions stuck on the Fields of Justice."

Zed and Syndra both stared as the Spartan left, one confused as to how he was going to do what he said he would do without any sort of magical talent, and the other wondering just how he intended to get past all the automatons without help.

The Chief did not think anything like those thoughts, of course. He was trying to formulate a plan, though he was not entirely sure it was even attemptable.

Eventually he reached a hallway intersection that was blocked by a large amount of rubble. The hall ahead of him was the path to the summoning platforms, but there was no way he could get by it now. He briefly considered backtracking, but saw a hole in the wall to the right of him. The hole was small, but he was able to rip off enough chunks of marble to widen the hole enough for him to just squeeze through.

As soon as he got through his motions sensor pinged. A Mech was on

the floor, its body shattered below the waist. It had probably been lying there, unmoving, until something came by " in this case, the Chief.

The Chief smashed its head in with his armoured boot and continued onwards.

He was in another hallway, the one that he usually took to get from his room to the cafeteria.

_That's good, _he thought. _Another way to the platforms._

The windows on the right side of the wall were shattered, sending glass on the floor. There were several cords dangling just outside them.

Clearly the Mechs had breached the building by rappelling down.

Contact. A ping on his sensor.

It was blue.

He began to stalk forwards, AR raised. Naturally, he assumed it was a trap. He moved, making his way over the chunks of stone. As he neared the contact, he could hear a faint noise, almost drowned out by gunfire.

Crying?

He turned a corner, following the dot on his HUD. There, to his left, in a small alcove that had been carved out by the fighting.

He turned into the alcove, his finger hovering just over the trigger.

It was a girl. A Champion, to be precise. Her name was Annie, he remembered. Or at least he thought.

Her eyes widened and filled with fresh tears as the Chief loomed over her.

He lowered his weapon and stood up straighter. He held his hand out the girl, offering to help her up. She took his hand gingerly, watching him intently as if he was going to strike out at her.

She rose up, her tears gone but still wary.

"Are you okay?" Chief asked somewhat awkwardly. He had no idea how to address children, even gifted ones like her.

Fresh tears welled up in her eyes. "They took Tibbers!" she whined, loudly enough to make the Chief wince. Not in pain, but in annoyance. Enemies would be sure to hear the girl.

The Chief grimaced beneath his helmet. He looked around the corridors, but his sensor already told him there were no friendly Champions there to take care of this girl for him. Really, she was just wasting his time, and he needed to "

Need to. He didn't need to do anything. Technically, it wasn't in his agreement to defend the League, should it come under attack. Why was he rushing into combat so readily?

As he looked at the girl, he knew his answer. It was the same for every single time he went into combat, every time he tried to sacrifice himself.

"Who is Tibbers?" he asked.

Annie rubbed her eyes. "Tibbers is my bear! The bad guys took him!"

"Where?"

Fresh tears began to roll down her face, cutting through the dust that the ruined ceiling had dropped onto her. There were several cuts and burn marks on her skin, evidence that she had been in combat.

The Chief crouched down, roughly reaching her eye-level. When he spoke, he tried to make his voice as clear and calming as he could. "I am going to get Tibbers back. I need you to tell me where the bad guys were."

Annie looked up, hopeful despite the tears streaming down her face. "Save Tibbers?"

Chief nodded. Annie smiled weakly and pointed in the general direction of the cafeteria.

Chief nodded again and stood up, only to hear Annie stand up beside him. "Don't leave me," she said.

"I'm going to get Tibbers."

"Tibbers needs me. I'll go too."

He sighed. Children really were not his thing.

"It's safer here," he said, shaking his head. "I'm going to where the... bad guys... are."

Annie shook her head and held her ground. The Chief knew he should leave her here — she would be a liability. He couldn't watch over her and fight.

But she hadn't become a League Champ for being weak. And really, he had been just like her, once, and he had never lost.

He set off without saying anything, allowing her to decide if she really wanted to follow or not. She did.

They walked down the hall, rubble and debris hampering their progress. To the Chief, it looked like that's all the Mechs had done: cause as much destruction as possible. He saw more rubble than bodies.

Even as he said that, bodies came into view. Three of them, all Mechs. Each one was disfigured as if they had just gone through a

chemical fire. The ground around each one was ringed with soot, and the stone itself appeared disfigured.

He noticed that the footsteps behind him had stopped, and he looked back to see why.

Annie's face was pale, and she stood stock still. Chief knew then, without a doubt, that she had killed these Mechs and they had been the ones to wound her.

He briefly considered rebuking her for coming with him, but the words died in his throat. As he gazed at the fallen rangers, he felt himself begin to ever so slightly admire the girl. She was tough, that was for sure. Maybe as tough as Kelly, back when she was a girl.

Scratch that. He wasn't sure anyone was as tough as Kelly.

"I'm scared," she whispered. The Chief didn't blame her. Intimidation was as much of a weapon as any assault rifle, and these Mechs were built to do just that. Not to mention their potent weapon systems.

He realized he should say something, but he wasn't sure what was appropriate.

"To be scared... is to be human. Doing what you have to do, in spite of fear, is what turns humans into heroes."

Annie looked at him, her mouth a grim line. He was certain that half of what he just said had gone over her head, and he was wasting time by talking. He turned back, looking to the cafeteria doors, which were both miraculously intact.

"Does that mean you're a hero?"

Chief didn't bother to turn fully; he just moved his head a fraction to the side.

He could remember Halsey and her inspirational speeches. Each one had reinforced the fact that the Spartans would be the hope of humanity in the dark days of the insurrection "and later the covenant. They would be heroes in shining armour, and he had wanted to be one. The military press had sold that image really well, too.

But the Chief was no longer so sure about any of it. He did what he did because it was what he was trained to do. He didn't charge twenty men because he was brave, but because that was what he was supposed to do. It was his duty to humanity.

He never did anything brave because he was never scared of it. And with Cortana, everything had seemed doable.

"No," he said at last.

He walked towards the door, fully ready to combat anything that was inside. As it turned out, no one was inside. The battle must have moved on from this room.

"Tibbers!" Annie was pointing to a toy bear lying under a table near

the far end of the room. She began to move towards it.

It was at that moment that the Mechs decided to make their presence known.

The moved fast, coming in from another door. They moved faster than the Chief's motion sensor could refresh, and so he was caught off guard and in the open when they began to fire. He ducked under a table which didn't fully conceal his armoured bulk. He mentally cursed himself for not paying more attention.

He returned fire in a quick burst before turning around to find the girl. "Annie! Stay in cover!"

Maybe she did not understand him, or maybe she did not care. She continued towards her bear, crawling instead of walking.

He cursed himself again and flipped the table onto one of the Mechs. He fired into the chest of the other, the armour-piercing bullets tearing through the metal and hitting the generator on its back.

The Mech pushed away from him and flailed for a moment, and just like a grunt with its methane tank ignited, it exploded.

_So the generator is a weak point, _he thought. He made sure to remember to update his database later.

His shields took a volley of shots, draining them to quarter strength. He ducked back into cover, behind another table. The Mechs had moved back, making a ring around the door, intent on protecting whatever made was past it.

With a jolt, the Chief realized what they were protecting. The cafe led to the massive chamber which led to the summoning platforms. It was the room that supported this entire section of the building, and just above it were the Summoner offices with all their reservoirs of knowledge and weapons. It was the perfect place for a bomb. It would also explain the lack of enemy activity here. Despite the destruction he had come across, there had been no actual engagements until now. They all would have gone to reinforce this area.

He poked his head over cover, ready to charge them. They may be tough, but he was more than sure he could take them all on. They may look like elites, but they sure weren't as deadly as them.

Before he could charge, however, he heard a girly voice shout "Tibbers!"

A new contact appeared on his sensor, but he didn't need it to tell him that something new had entered the room. The flash of light and massive blast of fire had done that just fine.

A large bear was standing in the midst of the Mechs, only half of which were still standing and operational after the fire. The bear made short work of them, tearing at the metal hulks like paper. Annie casually tossed out fire balls, laughing as she did so.

Soon enough, the Mechs were all inactive, and the Chief found himself more than a little bit awed. Sure, he had come to terms with magic, but it was still incredible to see it in action. The fiery bear had

to be the size of brute chieftain, if not bigger.

The bear disappeared, and the Chief made his way towards the girl, who was hopping about and talking aboutâ€| skipping?

"Thanks," he said, and truly meaning it.

"Tibbers always protects his friends," she said. That made the Chief pause. Did she mean he was the friend, or herâ€|?

It was at that moment that he noticed that he could hear much less fighting than before. He turned back to the door and began to move, double timing through the corridors, but always keeping Annie in sight, giving her time to catch up.

His motion sensor pinged, faded dots showing up to his left.

He rounded the left corridor, where two people were locked in combat. The ground around the pair was littered with rubble and bodies, most probably of the guards â€" enemy and native â€" stationed there.

Viktor was fighting a large man who was clearly augmented. The man was wearing a large, bulky exoskeletal suit, reminding him of Mark 1 Mjolnir Powered Assault Armour. It clearly gave him massive strength, because he was slowly pushing Viktor back, forcing him against the wall.

The Chief raised his rifle and put a burst in the man, just enough for him to flinch away from Viktor. It was only a moment of respite, but he used it to raise his extra hand and lazer his opponent right in the face.

"Unacceptable," Viktor said. "Absolutely unacceptable. This is a mockery of my glorious evolution! Who would DARE create such and OBSCENE fusion of sacred techmaturgy and wasted flesh?" He shoved the corpse with his foot, clearly distraught by it.

Annie had caught up to them by then and upon seeing Viktor hit the corpse she raised her hands and engulfed it in flame. After a few moments it was unrecognizable as the being it had once been.

Viktor stared at it, then nodded, satisfied. He turned to the Chief and said, "Now you, you are the perfect combination of techmaturgy and flesh. Why, together, I'm sure we could crea-"

"No," the Chief interjected. He looked down the hallway, where he could see the doors that would lead to the central summoning chamber.

Viktor followed his gaze and nodded. "I tried to get in there too," he said. "The doors are barred shut, though. My augments were unable to breach it."

The Spartan walked up to the doors, placing a hand against them and testing them. They were tough and unyielding, but he was sure he could wrench them open. He gestured to his two companions.

"I'm going to open these doors," he told them. "I need you two to give me cover."

They both nodded after exchanging a glance of unease.

He squarely faced the doors. He mag-locked his MA5C to his back, and then drew back his right fist. He punched the line where the two doors met, causing them both to buckle slightly inwards. He then placed both his hands in the tiny gap he made and began to force the doors apart.

Wood began to splinter, raining chips down on them. The Chief could hear some shouting on the other side, and the sound of weapons being charged up.

"Now," he ordered.

With a shout of "Tibbers!" Annie threw her doll into the gap, causing an explosion of fire, which fortunately â€" or maybe unfortunately - did not affect the magick-proof doors.

Not to be outdone, Viktor shouted "Chaos Storm!" and a massive singularity field appeared through the gap, making it hard to see. Nonetheless, a few shots managed to hit the Chief, but his shields held.

With a massive cracking noise the doors splintered in half, falling inwards in pieces, revealing the room to the trio.

The Chief took it all in in a heartbeat: the dark-clothed and armoured man in the center, obviously the leader, holding what looked to be a beam rifle. The fifteen Mechs surrounding him, facing the door. Five more of the augmented soldiers from the hallway. The bodies of Summoners on the floor. The Summoners and Champions tied up at the back of the room. The small bomb in the center.

"Annie, free the prisoners!" he shouted, already leaping forwards to the enemy leader.

He pulled his assault rifle free, spraying it at his target. A laser from Viktor speared through two of the Mechs, turning them into molten slurry.

His target was fast, ducking behind another automaton to shield himself. From his new position he took aim, his beam rifle transforming into something more like a fusion rifle.

He fired, and the Chief rolled left, dodging the initial shot. The beam swept for him, and the Chief was forced to change direction when it hit him. The beam drained his shields rapidly, bursting the moment he took cover behind a pillar.

The beam hit the pillar, burning through it as fast as a hot knife goes through butter.

"Gravity Field!"

The Chief rolled out of cover, seeing that Viktor had managed to slow down the group of enemies, Chief's target included.

The rest of the Mechs began to fire on Viktor, but he began to laugh, tossing power transfer after power transfer into them.

The Chief ran full speed and smashed into a Mech, shattering half its body and throwing it aside. He swung the barrel of his weapon at the dark-clothed man, but the man was far faster than the Chief had anticipated, and his blow failed to land. Knowing his MA5C would be less effective at this close of a range he drew his magnum, shooting the man several times, but to no visible effect.

Well, that proved the strength of his target's body armour, at least.

The man tumbled back, his fusion rifle reverting back to its original form as he did so. The man rose up in a crouch and fired, and the Chief was forced to roll to the left to avoid the beams. One of the beams managed to hit him despite his roll, penetrating armour and searing through the middle of his chest.

His health bar began to pulse red, indicating that the beam had done severe damage, but no further warnings appeared, so he assumed the beam had missed and major organs.

Well, that proved that the man's weapon was far more powerful than anything the Chief had on him at the moment.

The Chief rose up and drew his new knife from his shoulder guard, swinging it at the man. His target was unable to move quickly enough to dodge the knife because of the position he was in, so he brought his weapon up in an attempt to block the blow. The knife buried itself in the barrel of the weapon, sending sparks flying, before bursting in a bright, blinding flash of light. Even with Chief's visor automatically dimming, he was unable to see anything.

The light faded after a few seconds, only for him to see the man stumbling out of the room, along with the remaining mech.

The Chief glanced around the room, noting that almost everyone had been freed. No one appeared to have been hurt during the fight, with the exception of Viktor, whose left leg was trailing along the ground slightly.

The Chief's eyes alighted on the bomb and he knew why his enemy had made such a quick escape. He ran up to it, but there were no wires or control panel that he could see. Without Cortana, it would take much too long to disarm it even if he had located them.

He looked to the right, seeing that the High Councillor had moved up beside him, rubbing her wrists from where the rope had chafed against them.

"Stay here," Chief said, grabbing the bomb and rising up to his full height. "I'm leaving the Institute."

The High Councillor had to look up. "...Where are you going?"

The Spartan allowed himself to smile, then. "Giving our friends back their bomb."

He broke into a run, knowing full well that the enemy would be far ahead of him by now. It wasn't too hard to follow the two escapees, though, and soon enough the Chief found himself at a stairway and he

could hear voices and engines at the top.

He climbed up, rising four steps at a time. At the top, he could see three dropships just taking off. They looked vaguely like pelicans, their black armour absorbing the light from the sun high above them. On the ramp of the rightmost one was the black clothed man, who stared back at the Chief.

The Pelicans rose higher up, out of range of the Chief's pistol.

He looked down at the bomb in his hands, and looked back up, doing some quick calculations in his head.

He hurled the bomb with all his strength, its path carrying it close to the dropships, but just out of range of them.

But just in range of his pistol.

The man in black raised a hand in what seemed to be a farewell greeting.

He fired twice, the bullets striking the metal casing of the bomb, causing the lethal chemicals and potent magical energies inside it to mix earlier than intended.

There was a flash of light that, just briefly, eclipsed the brightness of the sun. There was a massive blast of noise, deafening in volume, and it was strong enough to push the Chief back a step.

Two of the pelicans had been vaporized outright, but the last one â€" the rightmost one â€" was just trailing smoke from its wing and engine. It fell slowly, crashing further into the city.

The Master Chief coughed, and tasted a coppery taste on his lips. He considered going down to the crash site to look for survivors, but decided against it. There were people inside that needed his help, after all.

He turned his back on the smoke rising up from the city and descended into the League of Legends.

* * *

><p>Shit finally hits the fan. Yaaaaaaaay.

Obviously this chapter will be...less vague next chapter, if you catch my drift.*
>

**Geez, That was the longest chapter I've written so far. Right. Anyways, I'm not sure when the next update will be, only because I got my copy of Halo:Master Chief Collection yesterday and I may be doing that in my spare time. I'll try to have it up by the end of this week, but I can't make any promises. **

So... See you again?

28. Chapter 28

Chapter 27 - Rolling Thunder

The Master Chief put a burst into the Ranger mech he was standing on, satisfied once it fell limp. He then leaned back just in time to avoid a sizzling energy blade from another one of the Rangers, and put the last rounds of his assault rifle right into its domed head.

There was a crunching noise as Lee Sin dive-kicked the automaton on the Chief's right side, his foot leaving a perfect hole through the things chest. The monk managed to dash towards the Chief just in time to avoid the explosion of the thing's generator.

The Chief quickly reloaded his weapon as he advance further into the street. He fired one handed into the largest concentration of Rangers, drawing his magnum in his off hand and using it to pick off the more scattered Mechs.

"Chief?" Quinns voice, laced with static, reverberated around the Chief's helm. "We have them routed over here."

The comm system that the Chief had been allowed to patch into was unreliable at best and downright unusable at worst. The entire thing was based off of a veryâ€¦ loose form of magic and hextech, which was why it went unused by the majority of the League. Unfortunately in this situation it was the best any of the Champions could do, since they didn't have their Summoners speaking in their heads. Although, to be honest, the Chief was happier without the Summoners.

Everything had been in complete disarray before the Spartan had taken operational control of the League's defences. He had managed to co-ordinate the remaining survivors and recently freed Champs into a coherent fighting force, and they were steadily repelling the enemy. The only real problem was the fact that the majority of the Champions had no actual military training, but that wasn't as much of a problem as the Chief had assumed it would be.

"Quinn, I want you to take your squad to grid 12 by 10 and stay there," was the Chief's response. "Anyone with ranged weapons should be moved to the rooftops for maximum effectiveness."

Quinn's voice filtered back. "Soâ€¦ Where's that, exactly?"

The Chief sighed internally. "Market district," he said as he gunned down a pair of Rangers trying to set up some sort of turretâ€¦ or something.

She confirmed the order once and ended the comm.

The Chief dropped down as a volley of return fire came from the group of Mechs. In response, he primed a plasma grenade and threw it at them before diving behind a wall.

The Mechs completely ignored the hissing bomb, and so they were all reduced to piles of molten slag once it detonated.

From his position behind the wall, the Chief calmly reloaded both of

his firearms. The area was silent, the last of the Mechs having been cleared out of this area. The Chief could hear the others around him trying to catch their breath, resting from the exertions of combat.

"Master Chief?" The voice was laced with static, but recognizable.

The Spartan tilted his head. "Yes, High Councillor?"

"Chief, I would like for you to return to the Institute now. There is a discussion going on in my office that I would like for you to be a part of."

The Chief answered "yes" after several seconds; not long enough to be disobedient, but just long enough to show his displeasure at the order.

The Chief spent the next few minutes reorganizing his limited forces, effectively halting their momentum as he began the long retreat back to the Institute of War.

* * *

><p>The Chief walked towards the High Councillors office, just like he'd been 'asked' to do. It was nearly two hours since the failed attack on the Institute. While many of the Champions were busy weeding out the rest of the automatons from the surrounding area, some were currently locked in discussion with the Summoners about who could have caused the problem.<p>

Apparently the High Councillor valued the Chief's opinion enough to include him in their talks.

It was just like these people to start discussions while there was still a battle going on. Unfortunately the Chief held no real authority here, so he was not able to ignore the summons and continue hunting down automatons.

As the Chief neared the door, it slammed open, revealing Jarvan IV. He walked towards the Chief, nodding to him as he passed by.

The Chief didn't pause and continued towards the door, already knowing full-well that the 'talks' were over. He knocked on the door, waiting for permission to enter.

"Come in," came the weary voice from inside.

The Chief opened the door and walked in, noting that the office was less pristine than before. Chairs were scattered about the room, and a great crystal map of Valoran lay on the table. The Councillor herself was in less than top condition: the raid had taken its toll on her as well.

She looked up warily as the Chief entered. "Have you found the culprits?" Chief asked, cutting right to the chase.

She shook her head. "Those idiots can't agree on anything. Demacia, of course, accused Noxus, and they got pissed and left, and Zaun decided to side with them. And naturally, that means Piltover sided

with Demacia, and Ionia goes declaring neutrality. Again. And Freljord now has its own problems to deal with. So really, were in a worse spot than before all this happened."

The Chief nodded, taking all that information in. He glanced down at the map, looking at all the red lines and dots that permeated its surface. It was actually very interesting. The map resembled the holographic-tactical maps that the UNSC used, but everything here was marked out by red dots, lines and crystal versions of what looked like chess pieces.

Kolminye followed his gaze. "That's an enchanted map, belonged to one of my predecessors. We've been getting requests for help since the time of the attack, and the map has logged them all down for us. As you can see, the enemies' forces are very large. They are attacking along a large front."

Even as she said this one another red dot appeared, pulsing vividly, and sighed as she removed another of the chess pieces from the board.

The Chief looked at the map, studying the force dispositions of the enemy. Kolminye did not even look down, instead playing with the crystal piece she had just picked up.

"No," Chief stated.

Kolminye looked at him, surprised. "No... what?"

The Chief pointed at the lines. "A force of small size that moved fast enough would be able to cover that large of a front fairly easily. Constant offensive to give the illusion of size."

The Councillor traced her finger along the lines for a few minutes and found that what the Chief said was, indeed, reasonable. "That still does not help us figure out who's behind all this," she said sadly.

"Why did Demacia accuse Noxus?" Chief asked, seemingly out of the blue. "They fought alongside each other just now."

The High Councillor frowned, trying to figure out where the Chief was going with this. "Remember when the Noxians were forced to pull out of Kalamanda a while back? A large force of those Mechs hit there hard and drove out all the Demacians, apparently. They think its revenge for what happened."

"Or that was the way it was meant to be seen," he said, studying the large dot that was centered on Kalamanda.

"What?"

The Chief did not immediately respond, instead continuing to stare at the lines.

"A diversion," he said at last. "If they had the forces to attack across such a broad front, why would they focus their efforts here?" He gestured to the various dots scattered around the farmlands south of Demacia. "The League is home to the strongest people on this planet. It would make sense for it to be a prime target. Instead, it

was hit by a small strike force that needed a bomb. If they have the sufficient troops to siege Kalamanda and rout an army, why did they not use it to attack the League? This is more of a threat than the Demacians."

The High Councillor pursed her lips. "So they're after something in Kalamanda?"

The Chief did not answer at first. He stared down at the map, inputting the dot locations into his database.

"Is there anything of tactical value there?" he asked at last.

"Just the crystal mines and the Nexus'."

"Can hextech run off of those crystals?"

Kominye's eyes widened as she understood what the Chief was getting at. "Drake!" she called out. A few seconds later a Summoner entered from one of the rooms adjoining the office. He bowed swiftly and gracefully from the waist.

"I want you to try and make contact with the Nexus's on the Crystal Scar," she said.

The Summoner bowed again before leaving the room. The High Councillor then towards the Chief, who said, "We need to retake Kalamanda to stop them from increasing their numbers."

The High Councillor tapped her lip thoughtfully. "We will need an army for that, and we happen to be short of those at the moment. We can't even count on our own Champions to help us, either."

The Chief decided not to volunteer the information that he was, essentially, a one man army. He wasn't about to risk his life fighting for them when he had to return to the UNSC.

"What about the Demacians?" he asked, figuring that they would be the most likely to help reclaim their former town.

Kolminye shook her head. "They are already organizing a war council to declare war against Noxus, and we can't stop them in our current state. They are unlikely to help us unless we can prove Noxus' innocence. And before you ask, Noxus already said they won't do anything until Demacia makes a formal apology."

The Chief frowned at that setback before remembering a useful piece of information. "No bodies were found at the dropship crash site?"

The Councillor, once again confused at the Chief's sudden change of topic, shook her head.

"Their commander was there," said Chief. "I can track him and bring him in."

Kolminye looked at the Chief as if he was saying he would pull down the moon. "They have at least two hours on you," she said. "And we don't even know where they could be."

"They left their assault vehicle here," he stated, referring to the warthog he disabled in front of the building. He jabbed a finger at the dot on the map that was closest to the Institute. "No significant attack was reported to have been made in this area for the last hour. Their forces have not moved out. This is their forward base of operations. They will be there."

She looked at him with equal parts of doubt and hope. "I've been talking with the top military leaders of the land for at least an hour, and in less than a minute you've been able to reasonably speculate their plan of attack, forward base of operations and where the majority of their forces are located." She smiled grimly. "You really are something else, aren't you?"

"Good training," was all the Chief had to say.

Summoner Drake re-entered at that moment.

"High Councillor," he said. "We have been unable to make contact with the two nexus. It is as if they are not there."

High Councillor Kolminye set her mouth in a grim line and looked to the Spartan. "See it done," she said, before removing another chess piece from the board.

* * *

><p>"Hey Tinny! Where ya goin'?"<p>

The Chief turned to face Vi, who had intercepted him on the way from his room to the jeep. She poked at the gear in his arms. "On a mission?"

He nodded and resumed walking.

"Oh oh, can I come? We can kick mechanical ass together!"

He shook his head. "You can't be seen fighting opposite to the interests of your city-state."

Vi pouted. "Awwwww."

The Chief paused, a wild thought occurring to him. He turned back to Vi. "You know the dropship that crashed? Can you rebuild it?"

Vi brightened. "Of course! I'm a boss at building things! Enhanced these gauntlets myself! Butâ€¦ uh, I might need material for that."

"Tell the High Councillor that you have my permission to use any material you need from the stores in order to help me with my mission. And get some help with it, It needs to be done quick."

Vi nodded enthusiastically. The Chief continued on his way to the car, content with knowledge that he would soon have a Pelican.

The car was in the place that he had left it. He stowed his gear in the back first, making sure it was all in good condition. The SPNKR rocket launcher he had received from his second (and last) shipment from Heimerdinger was his heaviest weapon, so he strapped it and the

four rockets to the side, making sure it was completely secure. He did the same on the opposite side with his sniper rifle. While he had five magazines for the gun, he was sure he would be unable to use it, seeing as how the sixty caliber bullets would blow holes through the target that he needed alive. He locked one of his DMR's onto his back, knowing that he would need it because he was down to his last set of clips for his AR. The Professor had also recovered an SMG with two clips, so the Chief stashed that beside the driver's seat. It didn't have enough ammo to be worth keeping, so he decided he would use it all this mission.

He then began to inspect the Warthog spinoff, making sure it was usable. For the most part, it was unharmed, and even better for the Chief the driver's seat was set up in the same way as a warthog. While the various levers, pedals, buttons, and the wheel may not do the same things, he reasoned it would be similar enough.

He tested his weight on the vehicle, but it held, staying completely balanced. He began to get in.

"Really?"

The Chief turned around, seeing Riven, Graves, Thresh and Yasuo in a group behind him.

"I'm on a time-sensitive miss-" he stopped talking as Yasuo walked up the vehicle and began prodding it with his finger.

"You know we're coming too, right?" Riven said, looking grim.

The Chief shook his head. "No."

Yasuo laughed. "We all want revenge for what the bastards did to us. We didn't even get to fight them 'ucz of that rocket they gave us." He looked back at Thresh. "Well, except for him. I think he just wants the soul of their commander, because he can't claim anything from the rest of 'em."

"I'm faster on my own," Chief stated.

Graves gave a chuckle. "We all are. You think I wanna travel with these morons?" he said. He blew a smoke ring out from his mouth then dropped the cigar, crushing it beneath his boot. "There's a reason the League makes us fight in teams."

The Chief shook his head, adamant that they would not be joining him. "The League is a game. It does not prepare you fo-"

"We know the stakes," Riven interrupted. She gestured around with her arm. "We don't belong to anything, so no one can complain about us helping you. And besides revenge, we aren't about to break our oaths of service to the League over some shitty robots."

The Chief sighed audibly. Really, he had no more reasons to tell them they couldn't join him. "Everyone looks after themselves. Everyone obeys my orders, no matter what. Someone gets left behind, leave them."

With that, the Master Chief got into the hextech warthog, revving up the crystal engine on the back, causing sparks to fly.

The group exchanged looks.

"Shotgun," Graves cried, moving to get in to the passenger seat. The rest of them scrambled after him.

* * *

><p>This is all I could get out in between Halo:MCC. Sorry if its kinda weak or short compared to the last chapter, but I tried. Kinda. Anyways, lazy writing aside, has anyone seen the Halo 5 beta gameplay? Looks freakin' sick as hell. Not really halo-ey... but sick as hell.

I'll try to get another chapter out soon, and it'll probably be another battle. Hopefully things are still staying interesting for everyone.

Peace?

29. Chapter 29

Chapter 27 - Warning: Hitchhikers May Be Escaping Convicts

The Master Chief pushed his foot down as far as it would go on what he assumed to be the gas pedal, trying to coax as much speed out of the vehicle as he could.

The group was currently racing along some fields to the south of the Institute, heading towards the area that the Chief assumed would have his target. Needless to say, the Chief wanted to get there before his enemy had a chance to escape.

The rest of his group didn't seem to share his sentiments. Graves, who was sitting in the passenger seat, had lit up a new cigar and was singing a song about daisies and women. Riven was currently pre-occupied with swiveling the turret that she was manning back and forth for no apparent reason. Yasuo was trying to figure out how a battle rifle operated, and was making the attempt to study its inner workings, but only got as far as reloading it. Thresh wasâ€| talking to his souls.

All in all, it wasn't the best team Chief had fought with. They certainly weren't close to blue team.

But they were the only team he had right now, and while he said he was better off alone â€" he knew he was better off alone â€" fighting as a team was always the better option.

So he would make do with what he had.

They crested the top of a hill. Just below, the Chief could see the village that constituted his target.

Just like the majority if villages in Valoran, it was small, and ringed by short wooden walls. Maybe that was enough of a defence to stop local predators, but it wasn't even close to being enough to keep out a Spartan in a warthog.

"Soâ€|," Yasuo drawled, racking the battle rifle bolt back for the umpteenth time. "How are we going to get in?"

The Chief did not bother to look back. He pushed the little lever that he figured out influenced speed forward, but kept the vehicle idle. "I thought we'd try shooting are way in," he replied.

Graves exhaled the smoke in his lungs slowly, looking back at the team as he did so. He gave a chuckle and dropped the cigar outside the truck.

"Stay alert at all times," Chief ordered, pushing down on the pedal that moved the vehicle.

The Warthog spin-off raced downhill, just as fast as the machines it was based off of. As they got nearer to the impromptu fort, the Chief could make out Mechs on the roofs of the buildings and along some of the low walls.

"Suppressive fire!" Yelled Chief, nearing the village.

Ten seconds later, he was still waiting for his suppressive fire.

The Mechs on the rooftops began to open fire, seemingly uncaring that their weapons were out of their effective range.

He tore his eyes from the sight ahead of him, glancing back at Riven, who seemed completely oblivious to his command.

"Shoot them," the Chief clarified, staring right at Riven.

This time, she got the idea and opened fire with the massive weapon. Bolts of what looked like plasma impacted the walls, and even though the shots were wildly inaccurate at this distance, the bolts chewed through the wooden walls.

The Chief drove towards the main gate. The enemy rose their heads above the short ramparts, oblivious or uncaring towards the incoming fire, and retaliated with a hail of lethal energy.

He heard the burst of a battle rifle come from the back seat, followed quickly by a "Mother Fucker!" From Yasuo.

"The kick on this thing almost dislocated my arm!" The Ronin shouted, which the Chief ignored.

"Spartan, the gates are closed," Thresh said in his deep, melodic tone.

The Chief didn't honour his statement with a response.

Graves smiled around his cigar as they entered optimal range for his shotgun. "We ain't gunna make it," he said.

This time, the Chief gave an answer. "We'll make it."

"We really are not going to make it," Thresh cut in.

The Chief braced himself as the warthog smashed into the gate, its

powered bulk tearing through the gate and sending man sized splinters into the ranger automatons beyond.

The Warthog skidded to a halt, its engine's power running low. The Chief jumped out, slashing at the first Ranger that he found, its head flying up into the air. Another one ran up to him on his left side, a piece of wood lodged into its abdomen. The Chief punched straight through the automaton, crushing its internal mechanisms with his fist before moving away to stab another mech in the face.

The whine of the plasma turret faded away as the last of the Ranger mechs were destroyed.

The Chief looked around, his SMG gripped in his left hand, his blade in his right.

The town itself was nothing special, all the buildings ramshackle. Which one would his quarry be hiding in?

In the distance, he spotted a house somewhat larger than the rest with a black flag above it, most probably the house of the village leader. If there was anyplace his quarry would be, it was there.

The Chief pointed his sword at Yasuo and Riven. "You two take the left flank. Distract the enemy, keep them away from that building." He pointed next to Graves. "Take the right side, keep it secure. If our target starts running, he'll be going that way. Thresh, you stay wit-"

"Why do I have to be stuck with the murdering Noxian?" Yasuo cut in, his voice a drawl.

"Hey!" Riven shouted, anger evident on her features.

The Chief shook his head, marveling at the ability of these people to argue in enemy territory. "_Graves _and Riven will take the left, and Yasuo will take the right. Thresh will stay behind and guard the vehicle and our escape. When the black flag lowers, fall back." With that, the Chief set off, allowing the rest of the group to begin on their assigned tasks.

He hoped that he could rely on them to do what they were told. Regardless, this was a blow through operation for the Chief, and he didn't see any problems arising.

He moved along, weaving his way through the haphazardly placed buildings. The Chief made sure to move at a pace that would allow the Graves and Riven to make a good distraction. It wouldn't help if he engaged the enemy before the pair could start shooting " or slashing.

A group of ranger automatons rounded the corner, seemingly oblivious to the Spartan standing in the center of the street. Before they could react, the Chief fired his submachine gun, using a full magazine to take them down. He reloaded, marveling at how quickly the weapon chewed through ammunition.

He took off, keeping to the side of the street in case he needed cover quick. It seemed most of his fears were ungrounded, however, as the enemy was sparse. It appeared that the enemy had kept a garrison

only large enough to keep control of the town, not enough to hold in case of a siege. Whatever army the enemy had positioned here had probably been recently sent out to attack. The Chief considered the option that his target had left with said army, but didn't pay it too much heed.

A ping on his motion sensor. Fire erupted from a street to his left. The Chief ducked, rolling under a sheet of solid blue flame. He scrambled back, his shields already draining from proximity to the torrent.

As soon as he was out of danger range, he fired at what he safely assumed was the center mass of the firer. His SMG was widely inaccurate, and his unseen target dropped only after his magazine had run dry.

He threw away the weapon as the fire abruptly stopped. He saw a Mech on the ground, its chest heavily cratered, holding a weapon that looked like a hybrid between a UNSC flamer and a Covenant fuel rod.

He heard metal footsteps approach from behind. He dove forward as another hail of burning bullets soared over him, grabbing onto the arcane weapon as best he could before unleashing its full fury.

The Mechs, again either oblivious to the threat or uncaring of it, ran straight into the torrent of flame, and were promptly melted.

Chief stopped firing the weapon and, after glancing around to ensure no enemies remained, cast it aside. He stared at the house, and was confident in his assumption that his target was in this location. Even mechs like sentinels wouldn't just charge into the infested high charity unless so ordered by their monitor. This only proved that someone else was pulling the strings here, someone scared enough to sacrifice his soldiers to stall.

There was an explosion far to the Chief's left, roughly in the area he assumed Riven and Graves to be. He could only hope that that was their distraction, and not them getting blown up on their first mission.

He moved forwards again, using the distraction to move quicker than before. As soon as he neared the large structure, however, he was forced to stop.

The entire entrance of the building was fortified. There were two stationary turrets placed along the stairs, two squads of rangers covering the doors, and a few more stationed in the upper story windows. The Chief was sure he would be cut down before making it there.

That did not mean he had no plan, however.

He quickly backtracked, grabbing the odd flamer and bringing it with him. This time he stayed in the buildings to the right, moving in them until he found a window that provided him with a view of the mech lines.

He sheathed his blade and grabbed his DMR, setting it down just

beside the window. He grabbed the large, bulky flamer with both hands and tossed it through the glass pane, his throw carrying it near the first of the turrets.

The Mechs looked down in unison, and then promptly opened fire at the house.

The Chief grabbed his DMR, sighting his scope on his target, oblivious to the plasma burning down the house around him. He was counting on the fact that his unknown enemy had copied more than just weapon aesthetics from the covenant.

He fired, missing all the Mechs and knocking up a cloud of dust at their feet.

There was a fizzing noise, barely audible over the plasma fire.

Then there was an explosion, blue flame and raw energy spiraling outwards in arcs. Any mech touched by the blast from the flamer were instantly disintegrated, their armour unable to handle the heat of a sun.

The Chief fired his DMR through it all, first striking down the second turret, then the window gunners. Then, satisfied that the explosion had died down, he drew his AR and dove in.

The few rangers that remained were unable to stop the Chiefs advance. The Spartan, for his part, didn't even shoot them, instead using the butt of his rifle to cave their heads in.

He pushed against the doors, and found them un-barricade. Clearly the resident of this place thought the defenses outside would be sufficient to deter any opponent.

The Chief moved through the building, sweeping every room. His motion sensor detected a faint red dot nearby.

His helmet transmitters also picked up a faint signal, but he was unable to clear it up because the two technologies were incompatible â€" at least, that was what he assumed. It seemed like the most logical reason.

He moved as close to the dot as possible, finding it on the other side of a door. He braced himself against it, preparing to smash it open.

A fist propelled itself through the door, smashing into the Chief's head.

His head snapped back, and he turned away from the door. The door then exploded outwards, hitting the Chief full in the body.

Just inside the doorway was what the Chief had assumed to be his quarry. It was one of the augmented men, wearing the exoskeleton that gave it incredible strength. It wore a helmet reminiscent of the rangers', but featured an antenna.

The Chief lunged towards his target, AR discarded on the floor, fist racing outwards.

The commander grabbed the Chief's fist, pushing it back, before hitting Chief in the stomach. Static discharged from its fist, travelling across his shield in arcs before bursting them. It then used that free hand to grab the Chief by the neck and squeeze, using it's bulk to smash and pin the Chief against the wall.

The Chief was at first surprised at how fast the tables had turned, and then was angry at being surprised. He had been caught unawares, and was paying for it.

He used his free hand to grip onto the arm that was choking him, and redoubled his punch.

No matter how strong the engineered man was, no matter how strong the exo-suit made him, it was nothing compared to a Spartan.

The Chief threw the arm off, spinning his target around before the blow landed, shattering the man's ribcage.

The commander drew an axe from side, but the Chief was far faster, his gladius already out and swinging. The blow severed the axe at the haft, sending its blade across the floor. The next swing was aimed upwards, sawing through the exoskeleton itself.

The commander tried to stop the Chief, but it was useless. The Chief's gladius finished its circuit, cutting off power to the man's right arm. While that meant half the suit was still powered, it was far weaker than before.

Another swing. The Chief ducked under it before coming back up behind the man, grabbing his arm and twisting it back. There was a snap, the sound of bone shattering, and the man began to whimper. His arm fell limp.

The Spartan kicked it to the ground, removing its helmet. While it certainly wasn't the man in black, it was definitely an important being.

Might as well question him, he thought.

"Who is causing this?" Demanded Chief.

The man responded by trying to spit in his face, but the Chief smashed its head back before it could. The Chief then grabbed its other arm and broke it as well, just for good measure.

"Who?" he asked again.

The commander told him everything.

* * *

><p>The Chief neared the vehicle, his prisoner on his shoulders. He had lowered the flag on the statehouse, and Riven, Graves, and Thresh were all by the vehicle. The sounds of combat had died down, but not completely.<p>

As soon as he got there he put the man in the back, ordering Thresh to keep him secure, which he seemed to more than happy to do. But as the Chief looked around, he realized something was wrong. Yasuo

wasn't here.

He looked at Graves, who shrugged. He looked to where the sounds of combat were coming from.

"Are we going?" Riven asked, confusion writ plain on her face. The Chief knew she would know better than anyone the problem of leaving people behind.

The Chief debated for a moment. Every second they wasted would see more destruction and misdirection upon the land. Tarry for too long, and it would be the end of Valoran, with factions pitted against each other in a false war.

And then he would never get home.

Not to mention the fact that Yasuo really had nothing to do with him, either.

"Wait here," he said. He then broke off into a run, trading protection and awareness for speed.

Whereas before the Chief had made his way around the buildings, this time he propelled through them, objects that would impede the movement of civilians doing nothing to stop his powered assault armour.

He quickly neared the source of the fighting, and his radar lit up with dozens of contacts, all converging on a single blue dot.

It was then that the Chief realized his initial assumption had been wrong. The enemy hadn't been sent out on an attack run, they were returning from one.

And Yasuo's flank contained the location of the town's secondary gate.

The Chief stopped as soon as the dots were lined up just ahead of him. He could go in from behind, flanking the enemy position, but then he decided to mix things up.

He resumed running, heading straight for the wooden building in front of him. He smashed through it, running right towards the clustered red dots closest to the blue dot.

He smashed through the final wall, AR ready to fire and realized he was staring at the sky.

It was then that he noted that the town hadn't been built on steady ground – it was on a hill. Yasuo's section was at the bottom of said hill.

The Chief began to fall, and he quickly formulated a plan. He had made a mistake, but he could turn it into an advantage. He overcharged his shields, and as soon as he smashed into the ground smack dab in the middle of the enemy forces, he detonated them manually.

The static shockwave burst across the rangers, each one either going haywire or exploding.

In an instant, a dozen rangers were wiped out. Chief turned towards Yasuo, who was leaning on his sword and breathing heavily, his windwall slowly fading away into nothingness.

Chief's motion sensor showed massed forces headed their way, so he snatched up Yasuo and began to run.

Yasuo began to make a fuss, angry that he was being carried along by the Chief. The Chief payed him no heed, knowing they didn't have the time to slow down.

They made their way through the buildings, climbing up stairs and narrow pathways until they were back at the top.

The Chief then dropped Yasuo, and the both ran through the Chief's path of destruction to the vehicle.

Yasuo was constantly looking around while he was running, muttering, "Looks like a tempest went through here."

"In, now!" Chief commanded as soon as they neared the vehicle, and everybody jumped in after glancing at each other.

The Chief quickly started the truck and spun the it around, knocking up clouds of dust. He then quickly gunned the warthog spinoff, jolting the vehicle forwards and out of the impromptu compound.

* * *

><p>The faint whining that was coming from the Warthogs power source had been tampering with the Chief's already patchy comm system, so he had to move away while he tried to secure a link to the High Councillor. The only good thing was the fact that the enemy was unable to patch into the system, so the Chief didn't have to be worried about an unsecured line.<p>

Static hissed across the line as the High Councillor finally answered.

"Chief?" she asked, bemused. "Howâ€|?"

"High Councillor. In my custody I have a Commander of the automaton's armed forces, and significant information regarding the person behind this."

The other end of the line was silent for a full minute.

"...Councillo-"

"That's incredible! I didn't think you could it so fastâ€|"

"Councillor?"

"Listen, Chief, the Demacian war council is taking place RIGHT NOW. Jarvan IV, as impatient as ever, had himself summoned to Demacia, so that the Council of Generals could meet right away. Me, being me, have to be there, so I will be summoning myself there shortly. You

need to make it there before its conclusion, if only to present what evidence you may have. Do you understand?"

The Chief actually had a hard time trying to understand what Councillor Kolminye was saying. She was speaking very fast, and it sounded like she was running, too, so everything had sounded a little bitâ€¦ rushed. Regardless, the Chief was sure he had gotten the gist of it.

"Understood, Councillor," he replied with smoothly. "One thing, though: I need you to bring Viktor, the machine herald, with you to the council."

"Iâ€¦ Uh, Why?"

"It'll help."

The Chief could almost hear the High Councillor shake her head over the comm system. "Alright, Chief," she said. "I want you to be there now."

The Chief closed the link after one final confirmation before looking back towards the rest of the Champions. Yasuo was having his wounds tended to â€"reluctantly, the Chief observed â€" by Riven. Thresh was toying with the half-delirious prisoner in the back, while Graves just stood there smoking.

He looked to the skyline, seeing the sun begin to dip down towards the earth. If he understood anything about the day-night cycle on this world, they had at least five hours before nightfall, maybe six. It should be enough, if he floored the vehicle.

The Master Chief began to walk back, mag-locking his assault rifle to his back as he did so.

* * *

><p>As soon as I finish MCC I get a copy of DA:Inquisition as a gift for no reason. I tried to finish this chapter to the best of my abilities before starting that, so I hope its okay. Hopefully. Other than that... uh, I got nothing. Just... thanks for reviewing and to all the people that are reading this story.

Yeah.

30. Chapter 30

Chapter 29: Speed Zone Ahead

The Warthog powered along the poorly-paved road, sending up clouds of dust behind it. The Scenery zoomed past, the occupants of the vehicle being more focused on speed than sight-seeing.

"Chief!" Yasuo yelled. "We got another squad up ahead to the left!"

The Master Chief looked over to the left to see that, indeed, there was a squad of Mechs running and shooting at them.

This had been going on for a while, random squads of mechs throwing themselves at the warthog spinoff in an attempt to slow it down. While the Chief would have just ignored them, no one else in this area had the capabilities to fight the automatons, so he cut down every enemy they saw so far.

The Chief spun the wheel to the left, slamming the hovering car into the line of ranger mechs. While at first he had some doubts as to the effectiveness of ramming a hovering car into enemies, his doubts had appeared to be ungrounded as whatever wasn't killed by the impact was electrocuted to death by the powerful energies of the crystal generator.

"Well, that takes care of that," Graves said from the seat right next to the Chief.

The Chief merely grunted as a response, turning the vehicle back onto the main road and continuing on.

The group drove on, the environment gradually changing from open plains, farms and dirt paths to cobblestone streets, houses and the signs of civilization. Every person they passed turned to stare, obviously confused at the sight of the strange and powerful transport.

The Chief ignored everything and everyone, trading awareness for speed.

It didn't take too long for them to reach the outskirts of the Demacia, the large city visible just down the hill. It was only then that the Chief was willing to slow down, and only because he was worried that the Demacians might mistaken a high-speed car for an attack rather than help.

They drove along the smooth stone road, passing by groups of ragged people that appeared to be refugees.

"Geez," Riven muttered. "Look at all these people. Have the Demacians been doing nothing?"

The Chief did not respond, but the answer to that question seemed fairly obvious. Not that the Chief could blame them; the UNSC had also been unable to provide for every refugee in the thirty-year long war.

The groups of people grew thicker the closer they got to the capital, and they began to press against the vehicle.

"Watch it!" snapped Yasuo angrily. Graves and Thresh just chuckled.

Guards at the main gate were taking names of people, sending most of the refugees that came away again. One of the guards looked up, saw the warthog, and immediately paled. He turned to his comrades, bringing their attention to the transport.

Graves smirked. "This should get interestingâ€¦"

The Chief kept the car idle as the squad of soldiers approached them,

trying not to provoke them into rash action.

The lead soldier, a sergeant by the looks of it, paused by the driver's seat with his hand on the hilt of his sword. "Business?" he asked, his voice one of command.

"We are expected at the war council," The Chief responded, also using his command voice.

The rest of the soldiers shuffled about as the chief's voice washed over them, obviously understanding they weren't dealing with some civilian or mercenary. The Sargent was less distressed, however.

"No one is permitted entry to the city," he said with finality.

"We need to be inside, now. Check this with your commander, its official," the Chief demanded. It was a bit of a bluff, since he was not sure if the High Councilor had mentioned him or not, but it might pay off.

It did not.

"I am under specific order _from _command that say no one can enter." With that, the Sargent brandished his sword, one meter of oiled steel, and held it point down. The rest of his soldiers quickly followed suit, but kept their blades pointed upwards. "If you convince command to lift those orders, you can pass. Otherwise, you do not."

Civilians quickly backed off, unwilling to be caught in the middle of this confrontation.

In response the act of aggression from the soldiers, the Chief's group raised their weapons.

Graves pumped his shotgun, chuckling, "well, so much for diplomacy."

The Chief silently agreed. But that didn't mean diplomacy was the only thing he had at his disposal. He raised his hand, signaling for the other Champions to lower their weapons. The Chief then proceeded to exit the warthog spinoff, rising to his full height.

The Guard Sargent had to look up at the Chief as he said, "Don't move another inch!" He emphasized his statement by pointing his sword at the Chief.

The Chief took a step forwards, allowing the blade to brush his shields ever so slightly; just enough to cause static to ripple over his body.

"We are going to the council, no matter what," he said. "You will not be able to stop us from doing so, and you deaths would just make the negotiations a little bit darker. Nothing else."

The rest of the guardsmen paled, but the Sargent, to his credit, did not back down. He did look rather queasy, though. "I-I can-not allow you t-to-"

"Do you really think you can stop us?"

The Sargent stood his ground for another minute before his trembling legs gave way. The rest of the guardsmen backed off, sheathing their weapons again. One ran to the gate, ordering it to be opened for visitors.

Chief got back into the vehicle and drove it forwards.

"Smooth," Yasuo said, his battle rifle still pointed at the guards.

The inside of the city was on full alert, apparently, but none of the guardsmen challenged the Chief's advance.

"Looks like they're on a total-war footing," Riven said from the turret seat.

The Chief was inclined to agree. There were ranks of soldiers bearing tower shields; archers fully manned the battlements, squads of swordsmen lead by champions. While there was a chance it was just a response to the rising Mech menace, it seemed rather unlikely.

The Chief drove slowly, making his way to the towering keep that he assumed housed the war council.

The closer to the keep they got, the thicker the protection was. The Chief eventually had to stop in a plaza just a couple of streets away from the keep, because there were so many royal guards on the roads.

The Chief got out and started walking, and the others followed him, Thresh trailing the prisoner behind him. Again, none of the guards challenged them, but the looks they gave the group could have melted through steel.

"Oh, geezâ€|," Yasuo muttered, clearly disturbed. The Chief couldn't blame him. Just ahead was the keep's central square, and it was fortified to the max. There were barricades with ballistae repeaters, catapults behind them, and enough soldiers there alone to subdue a town.

They made their way through the soldiers, heading towards the massive iron doors that gave entrance to the stone structure.

This time, they were stopped.

The guard was someone the Chief had seen before, back at the Institute of war. She was a half-dragon, or something of the sort. Her skin was blue, her armour red, and she looked angry enough to tear the group to shreds without provocation.

"No one passes," she said, a mirror to the guard outside the main gate.

"I am expected at the war council," the Chief responded with, also mirroring earlier.

Shyvanna, for that was the warrior's name, stared at the Chief long and hard. "I know you," she said at last. "You are the Master Chief, the sky warrior. You are strong, tough. Worthy."

The Chief stayed silent, unsure of what she was saying but not willing to interrupt her. He didn't want to intimidate someone while in the middle of a plaza filled with on-edge soldiers.

"You can pass," she said, before narrowing her eyes. "But only you."

The Chief paused, and looked back at the others. He turned back to the dragon guardian, and said, "We all go."

Shyvanna didn't even blink. "No," she said. "They will not. You I trust, they I do not."

Yasuo started at that. "Why you-"

"They have information relevant to the proceedings," the Chief lied. "And time is of the upmost importance."

Shyvanna shook her head. "Then you do not pass."

"Well, 'ain't she a stubborn one," Graves muttered under his breath. All that did was earn him a cuff from Riven.

"Go on ahead," she said. "We'll try and convince her."

The Chief nodded. He grabbed the prisoner from Thresh and pushed past the half-dragon, walking through the now-open doors as he did so.

He could hear the voices; obviously the war council, this 'Council of Generals', was already in session.

The Chief moved quickly, but the prisoner he dragged along made it a little bit difficult to do so.

"We have reason to believe these attacks are provocation from Noxus"

The Chief couldn't tell whose voice that was, but it didn't sound like things were going well so far.

"Do you have evidence to support these claims?" that was the High Councilors voice.

The Chief moved closer to the source of the sound. Back in the UNSC, and war meetings would have been conducted in a sound-proof room in order to stop people from listening in on what was said. Seemed that wasn't a concern, here.

".Proof unnecessary," said a new voice. It sounded like Jarvan IV, but the Chief couldn't be sure. He had not ever really heard the guy speak, after all.

The Chief stopped abruptly in front of a red-velvet lined door. His motion sensor was picking up dozens of neutral contacts, and the voice was clearly coming from here.

"Do you have proof to support your wild claims that Noxus is not, in fact, the aggressor of this conflict?"

The High Councilor stuttered. "I-I, well, th-that isâ€|"

"We do," The Chief said, slamming to door open.

The generals all turned in unison, each one with a look of confusion on their face. The royal guards in the room wall drew their swords, but did not move. Jarvan's mouth was set in a stoney line, and Kolminye's face was of hope.

_A little bit of theater always does the trick, _the Chief thought.

The room was layered into tiers with a golden podium at the bottom, where Jarvan was currently standing. The Chief decided to make his way down there, since it seemed to be the focal point for the meeting.

One of the Generals, a man with an elaborate mustache and golden armour, stood up with a flourish. "What is the meaning of this?" he demanded.

High Councilor Kolminye stood up. "Why, General, this is the proof you all asked for." The smile she gave him could have frozen hell over. The Chief was happy to note that Viktor was sitting beside her, impatiently tapping on their table with all three of his hands.

Jarvan IV fixed Chief with a hard stare. "Spartan," he said, in a manner that did not seem particularly friendly.

The Chief pulled his prisoner in front of him. "This man has a testimony he would like to share with all of you," he said.

The prince of Demacia stared at the Chief for a long minute, before nodding and standing down from the golden plinth.

The Chief forced his prisoner up before hitting him on the back.

"'Sup," it hissed through broken teeth.

Chief hit it on the back again, causing it's spittle to hit the surface.

"I am not some Noxian pig," it sneered. "I a field commander in the army of the great revolutionist, and you will all die."

That got a start out of the assembled royals. People began to move, some shouted, others drew their weapons in outrage.

Prince Jarvan was completely undisturbed, however. "Who is this great revolutionist?" he asked.

The augmented human just continued sneering. "Look at all of you, so broken and helpless. Had I known that just revealing we are not Noxian would rile you up so much, I would have thrown away the cloak of subterfuge long ago."

Jarvan IV walked back up to the podium and grabbed the commander by the neck, drawing it closer to him.

The assembled noble generals quickly fell silent as they stared at their prince.

"Who?" Jarvan asked again through clenched teeth.

The commander of the automatons smiled as best it could. "I serve the great revolutionist, he who will rewrite the world, Professor Stanwick the glorious."

Two things happened at that moment. The assembled Generals and Jarvan all said, "who?" almost simultaneously while Viktor stood up, flipping his table over as he did so.

The commander suddenly began laughing, but was cut short when Jarvan threw him off the stand.

"WHERE IS STANWICK?" Viktor roared, anger evident in his pose, despite his mechanical body. The light from the torches glinted fiercely off his metal skin, making him seem like a fiery god.

"I think the more pertinent question is who is Stanwick?" asked one of the assembled Generals, this one wearing silver armour sculpted to resemble flayed musculature.

Viktor turned viciously, fixing the General who spoke with a deadly glare. "The false Professor Stanwick is the mostâ€¦ vile creature to ever have been born."

The Chief decided to step up on the podium to help clarify, since he knew he could not trust anyone here to give any sort of concise report.

"Stanwick is a former partner of Viktor," Chief said. "One of the people responsible for the creation of Blitzcrank and Urgot. He is a skilled techmaturgist, and has spent the last while building up an army to overthrow the governments of Valoran." The Chief then gestured to the prisoner by his side. "All said by my captive, a human augmented by Stanwick."

Viktor was positively seething. "He stole credit for MY creation, and he still was not happy enough? He had to make a mockery of my glorious evolution, too?"

"I don't see how this is relevant at all," another of the assembled Generals confessed. "Thisâ€¦ Stanwick worked on Urgot, yes? A Noxian Champion? He may very well still be working for Noxus."

Kolminye stood up, although she looked a bit silly without a table. "How can you be so ignorant?" she demanded. "That man just confessed to not working for Noxus, and I doubt his maker even would, if half the stories I have heard about him are true."

"Is this true?" Jarvan asked Viktor.

Viktor nodded. "Stanwick worked with them once, and quit. He won't work with them again. When he does not get his way, he makes sure no one can win." Viktor shuddered in anger, an action the Chief had assumed was not possible for the mechanical man. "Which is why it is imperative that we DYSTROY HIM AND ALL HIS POSSESSIONS AT

ONCE."

Jarvan IV looked at the Generals, each one of them looking as if they were still processing Viktors statement. "Well?" the prince asked. "What do we make of this?"

One of the Generals stood up. "I believe thatâ€¦ what was said by our new guests should be taken into consideration," he said. "Their argument is entirely plausible."

There were several agreements to his statement.

"Nonsense!" another General cried, the same one from earlier with the mustache and golden armour. "This is more Noxian lies!" There were even more agreements to this.

Jarvan turned to the Chief. "Spartan, what do you believe?" he asked.

"Noxus is innocent of the crimes they have been blamed for," he responded smoothly. Jarvan nodded and held his hands up, and the court fell silent moments after.

"The words of the Institute of War have always carried weight here, and what they have revealed today rings with truth. This is a line of inquiry that we should pursue further, if only to find the real place to focus our righteous wrath." He turned to the Chief, who still stood on the podium. "Do you know where this professor is? We can take his facility and search it in order to make certain Noxus was not involved."

The Chief shook his head. "Unfortunately, our informant here does not know the exact location of Professor Stanwick's base of operations. Everything he has told me was just information of the inner workings of his complex. While that is useful, it is not particularly helpful right now."

The General in the sculpted silver armour stood up again. "How does this help us, then, exactly?"

"While our informant could not help us with the location of our enemies main base, he was able to divulge part of his plan," Chief said. "It seems that every field commander was given some sort of narrow orders, according to him. While this is not enough to specify our enemies entire plan, it makes sense with information the Institute has gleaned recently. The enemy is making it their top priority to funnel Valoran forces away from the region of land known as Kalamanda."

That got another outcry from the seated â€" and partially standing â€" warriors.

Really, the Chief thought, Generals should not be acting this way.

"What are you trying to say?" demanded a particularly large General.

This time High Councilor Kolminye spoke up, lending the weight and authority of her voice to the Chief's. "Stanwick's forces are in

Kalamanda and are attempting to keep it firmly under their control. It is the belief of the Institute of war that it is being used to create additional forces for their army. If that is the case, we need your armies behind us if we are to reclaim it."

Jarvan IV stood there, thinking, as the shouting in the room slowly died out. Finally he spoke up, saying, "This matter will be taken to the King, and he shall decide the final verdict." He turned to the Spartan, gesturing to the prisoner. "If you are correct in what you say, then you will have the armies of Demacia at your back."

The Chief nodded, handing the prisoner over to the Demacian prince, hoping this all didn't turn out terribly.

* * *

><p>"Spartan, that was a wonderful thing you did there," Kolminye said, stopping the Chief just outside the velvet doors.<p>

The Chief turned around. "I'm just doing what I was told," he responded.

The High Councilor chuckled. "I know," she said. "But I have to say, I really had my doubts about you, but no longer."

The Spartan just tilted his head in thanks.

"Take some leave here, enjoy yourself for a bit. I think you've earned it."

The Spartan shook his head, this time. "There is much to do and little time to do it."

He turned around and left, leaving her alone with her thoughts.

Naturally, though, that wasn't the end of the Chief's conversations for the day. He made it one level down and two halls over before he was stopped in a room with high, open windows that revealed the heavily guarded plaza.

"Master Chief," the warrior who stopped him said. The Chief knew this warrior, too; he had seen him many times on the fields of justice and in the war room just moments ago. This was Garen, Captain of the royal guard. "I wanted to congratulate you for what you achieved back there."

The Chief turned away and looked out the window. "That's the second time I have heard that, and nothing has even been resolved yet."

"All the same, I know the prince enough to tell that he believed you. You will get the troops you desire."

"Many of them will die," Chief said, "trying to break through their lines. This is not an easy choice to make."

"And all the same it has been made." Garen smiled. "But I did not chase you down to talk of politics. I wanted to say that you are a truly exceptional warrior, and I wanted to personally give you the

offer of joining the Royal Guard of Demacia."

The Chief turned his head. "Join?"

Garen moved by his side and looked down at the plaza. "It has been noticed by many that you are capable. In hard times such as these, the Lightshields need all the protection they can get â€" especially the prince, who will be on the front lines at all times."

The Chief shook his head. "I am not a guard."

"I will not simply make you a guard, of course. You will be the champion of Demacia, and shall only answer directly to me and your charges. No one else." Garen gave the Chief a sidelong look. "I saw theâ€| men you came in with. I can provide better people, more suitable to elite operations."

The Chief tapped his fingers along the silver-veined stone of the windowsill, thinking. "You make a good offer, captain," he said. "But I am already in a contract with the Institute of War."

He paused, and looked down at the Champions he had arrived with. Graves was smoking while sitting on a crate of ballistae ammunition, Riven was arm-wrestling Shyvanna, and Yasuo was trying to show Thresh how to operate a battle rifle. They were not the best, not even close, but they had heart. Even the Chief could admit to himself that he was not even close to being the best Spartan-II, and yet he had still been put in command. Skilled was not always best.

"Besides, I already have a squad," The Master Chief said, turning away from the window. "I have my blue team. They might not be the best, but they'll get the job done."

* * *

><p>I... actually have nothing to say this time, except that Dragon Age takes up a hell of a lot of time. Uh.. so review if there's anything you wanna say, otherwise I hope you all enjoyed?

31. Chapter 31

Chapter 31: Priority Shift

The Master Chief stepped back out into the courtyard, the shadows beginning to thicken as the sun began to dip towards the horizon. That didn't seem to be a concern for the guards, however, as they all stood at attention, ready for any threats that may present themselves.

All the guards except for the lieutenants, that is. They were, along with Shyvanna, clustered around the Chief's commandeered warthog. Yasuo was, apparently, teaching them all some sort of card game he had picked up while wandering out of Ionia.

So much for the pride of Demacia.

The Chief moved towards the other members of his team, who were standing just a bit away.

Graves noticed the Chief first. "Did it go well?" he asked, puffing out a few rings of smoke as he did so.

"It seems to have gone well so far," was his reply. He turned to face the rest of the group fully, but turned back to Graves a second later, saying, "smoking excessively is bad for your health."

The Outlaw just made a grunting noise as he tossed his cigar to the floor and crushed it.

"We have been temporarily permitted use of rooms B2-B7 on the second floor," Chief said briskly. Really, everything he said was done in a brisk manner, but that was more to do with his military upbringing than anything else. "Find one each and claim it. Make sure they are secure of any possible recording devices. I will be back later in the evening."

Thresh tilted his head, watching the Chief walk away but not saying anything.

Graves just chuckled, which in and of itself was not an odd action for the Outlaw.

The Chief walked away with steady steps, the crowd of guards parting for him. Just a few moments later he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, which he identified as being Riven's.

The Chief turned around and spoke first. "Is something wrong?"

Riven blinked. "No, nothing," she said. "Just wondering where you're going. It's not exactly safe to be out and about."

The Chief did not say anything, just stood and stared.

"Okay, maybe it's safe for you," she clarified, "but the others would rather you stayed nearby. You'reâ€¦ reassuring, you know?"

"I'mâ€¦" Chief trailed off, and shook his head. "I'm only going scouting. Maybe I'll get something to eat. I'm not starting another war." Despite his claims, The Chief was essentially preparing for a war. There was a distinct possibility that one or multiple of the Demacian Generals would not be pleased by the shift in plans, and may make an attempt on his life. If that was the case, the Chief wanted to be in a position that gave him ample fighting room â€" outdoors â€" and the chance to fully eliminate his enemies. He knew palaces and fortresses had dozens of ways in and out of them.

"Okay, then how about I come with you?" Riven smiled. "Just so, you know, nothing happens."

The Chief tilted his head, knowing full well that Riven knew what he would be planning to do. Not that it was difficult for a soldier like her â€" or any other soldier â€" to figure out. He did not respond, but turned away and continued walking down the street. She followed behind him.

As he walked, the Chief tried to accurately record the things he saw: positions of soldiers, siege engines, traps and barricades. Doing

stuff like that was second nature to him, after all, and it would be useful in case the city was ever attacked while he was still there. And after what happened at the Institute of War, he was not ruling out any possibilities.

A group of soldiers passed by, each in the livery of the King's royal guard. To the Chief, their armour was more ornate than practical, featuring some sort of wings on the helmet and ornamentation all over the metal plating that would, most likely, be damaged in combat. They also carried swords instead of guns, which the Chief saw as a tactical weakness.

But that wasn't his problem, so it did not matter.

"Just seeing those guys just makes my blood boil," Riven said quietly. The Chief turned to her, and she clarified, "I've fought these guys before, and they're really tough. And wherever they are, someone important usually is, too. That always means bad news for any battle line in their way."

Chief nodded. "We had that where I came from, too. Honour guard Elites. Fairly unstoppable for a normal marine."

Riven smiled. "Not for you, though, huh?"

The Chief shook his head. "Depended on the situation. They were never a pushover; none of the Covenant where."

"What was this Covenant, exactly?" she asked. "I mean, I know they were alien something or others, butâ€¦"

The Chief turned a corner where the defensives were slightly more sparse. True to his assumptions, he found himself in a civilian commerce area. Most of the area was empty, with very few people out at such an hour. The exception was, of course, the single cafÃ©, which was still bustling.

As the Chief made his way towards the cafÃ©, he responded with, "the Covenant was â€" or is â€" a collection of various, vicious alien races all united in their religious beliefs. It was, if nothing else, a religious organization."

Riven made an 'hmpf' noise as she pondered what the Chief told her.

The Chief took a seat at one of the cafÃ© tables, Riven sitting just across from him. He heard her order something, but he was too busy watching some archers set up a ballista on the roof to care. The Chief wondered about the effective range of the siege weapon; for it to have been placed here it would need to reach half the city, at least. Or maybe it was specifically for airborne attacks, but he was fairly certain it would be useless against pelican-based airships unless the bolts were explosive.

"I kind of wish I was there, if only to see what it was like," Riven said aloud.

The Chief turned to look at her, and Riven misunderstood the gesture, because she seemed to start panicking. "Not that I'm not taking it seriously," she stammered out, "it just sounds interesting. You know,

because we aren't that advancedâ€¦|."

She fell silent as the waiter reappeared with her drink. Riven muttered a 'thanks' and took a sip, and nearly spit it all back out.

"Damn," she exclaimed, "this tastes like dish water. Nothing like Noxian stuff."

The Chief shrugged. "Noxus _is _far away, so I would assume they use different ingredients."

"Maybe," Riven said and grimaced as she took another sip.

"Or maybe," said a new voice from behind the pair, "it's because the taste is too refined for you Noxian tongue."

They both turned around, and beheld one of the royal guardsmen of the king. He wore armour just as ornate as all the rest, but his seemed to be made of gold.

"Ex-Noxian," Riven said through narrowed eyes.

The guardsman shrugged. "I am not here to debate your questionable nationality. I am here to retrieve the sky warrior for an audience with the King."

Riven turned her head sharply to look at the Chief, but the Chief continued to look at the royal guard. "Has the king made up his mind?"

If the guard took offence to the Chief's tone, he did not show it. "I am not privy to the mind of the King," he said. "I have only been ordered to find you and bring you before him. Now please, follow me."

Chief got up and turned to Riven. "Finish up, and then head back to the dorm. Be ready for anything that may occur."

He received a nod in return.

"Okay," Chief said and followed the guard. "Justâ€¦| have you and your comrades stop calling me 'sky warrior'. It's inaccurate, unprofessional and it's a terrible nickname that won't stick."

The guard gave a bit of a chuckle as he led the Chief to another group of royal guards, the rest of his squad. They began moving towards the castle at a brisk pace, and Riven watched them until they went out of sight.

* * *

><p>"You must bow as soon as you reach the foot of the throne," the golden-armoured guardsman whispered, holding the handles of the throne room door. "And don't reach for any of your weapons."<p>

The man had tried to take the Chief's weapons upon arrival, but naturally that did not go through. There was no way the Chief was going to let himself be defenseless.

The guardsman opened the door, announcing the Spartan as he did so: "Now entering, Master Chief, Champion of the League of Legends."

The Chief walked into the hall, actually somewhat amazed at all the decore he saw. Not that he found it beautiful to anything, he just marveled at the amount of wealth royals had to throw away. This much gold could easily pay for a battalion of Scorpion main battle tanks, or a suit of Mjolnir.

Well, maybe not he Mjolnir.

At the end of the titanic hall was the single throne, set several wide steps above the ground. A man sat upon it, presumably King Lightshield III of Demacia.

The Chief stopped several paces away from the throne, nearby to where the two royal champions were standing. The Spartan did not bow, instead saluting in classic UNSC style.

"Sierra-117 reporting as ordered, sir," he said. It was instinctual for him to treat people of greater rank like this, even when they were not of recognized rank. He did it for Halsey, and he did it for the High Councilor, too.

The King tilted his head into his left palm. "You don't bow?" he asked.

The two champions shifted their stances.

The Chief was not too sure, but he thought he detected a bit of amusement in the Kings voice. "Sir, with all due respect, I don't bow."

The King laughed, and the champions relaxed. "I've heard quite about you, Master Chief," the King said. "And this is just the kind of stuff they said."

Chief stayed silent.

King Lightshield tilted his head into his other hand. "I've spoken to my councilors and my son, and most of them have agreed on the plan of action you have proposed. But, I must ask, what is your belief? Or rather, what is your gain in this?"

"Gain, Sir?"

"Ah, don't be coy," the King laughed. "I mean what do you hope to achieve, to receive, how do you think this will benefit yourself?"

"Iâ€¦ don't," the Chief said. "Iâ€¦ this is what I signed in my contract to the League, anâ€¦"

"All the other Champions signed the same thing, and yet here YOU are, not them."

The Chief turned away for a moment. Usually, when he was asked things, he was not asked for a motive. In fact, he was never asked for a motive. He actually wasn't sure how to respond, since this was something he was not very well-versed in.

"Well...", began the Chief. "This is what I do. I don't do it for a reason except that this is my duty. And I will see it done to any end."

King Lightshield III looked at the Chief for a long moment with narrowed eyes, then began to laugh. "Yes, exactly as I was told you would be."

The Chief shuffled his feet.

"You will get everything you have asked for," the King said. "My armies will mobilize, and they shall be ready by tomorrow evening at the latest. More can be worked out at the war council, which shall take place at midday tomorrow."

Chief nodded. "Has there been any word from the allies of Demacia, sir?"

The King waved his hand to a servant lurking near the throne. "Piltover has said they do not have the force necessary for any open warfare, and this is something I know for a fact. Our avarosan allies in the Freljord have been unusually silent, but it may simply be a case of bad weather. Regardless, more likely than not we will stand on our own in Kalamanda."

"Not alone, sire. The League stands with you, and offers any resources it can."

King lightshield drummed his fingers on his throne. "I see. And you speak for the Institute of War, do you?"

The Chief shrugged. "Somewhat."

The King grinned. "I really do wish you had taken Captain Crownguard's offer to join the guard. Having someone like you would be very useful." He held up his hand to stop the Chief's impending objection. "Not to worry, I can tell you are not a person that will be swayed by anything I have to offer you."

The King looked to the left as the servant entered with a plate of choice meats and a goblet of wine. "You may take you leave, Spartan. Tomorrow is a the war council, and the day afterâ€¦ well, that shall be war."

The Master Chief saluted again. He took one last room around the room, nodded to the two Champions, and then left.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

"He knows."

Marin stood in the cold, damp room. It was uncomfortable for him â€" very much so. The frosty fog inside was thick enough to make visibility near impossible if he tried looking at anything more than a meter away.

"I know that he knows," the Professor said, calmly inserting the last

hydraulic bundle into the leg of the thing he was creating.

"That makes thingsâ€¦ problematic."

"It was your job to make sure things did not come to this," his Employer said, wiping his hands on the front of his lab coat. Even then, it did not get dirty.

"It would have been done better if I had been given more forces." Marin moved to the side to get a better look at theâ€¦ whatever it was. "We knew it would be difficult, and yet it was not deemed priority one. As a result, it failed and I lost my weapon."

The Scientist shook his head. "It was not a priority, but neither did we expect that he would be able to capitalize on our defeat and gain the aid of a city-state."

His Employer sighed. "Not that I am particularly worried, for our goals will be achieved regardless. Kalamanda was to be the center, but we have gotten a decent amount out of it. If it is to be contested, then so be it."

He reached out and grabbed a set of screwdrivers from a side cabinet. "And I already have plans drawn out for aâ€¦ contingency plan, in the event that they actually manage to find their way here."

Marin tapped on the metal construct, trying to figure out how thick it's metal plating was. "So long as we move our forces right, they won't be able to predict where you are. They should be able to figure it, but even then it's not like they would _let _them search here."

"Quite right," the Scientist said with a smile. He reached into his lab coat's pocket and handed Marin a sheet of paper. "Regardless, you shall receive a new weapon shortly. You are going to be deployed _here, _with the express purpose making sure our forces push through. You are NOT to be directly involved in any fighting, do you understand?"

"Why is that, sir?"

The Scientist began to secure several small tubes to a port in the armour. "The people you shall be leading outnumber the mechs we have, and they will require much more guidance than our robots. If you were to be cut off from them, then we would likely lost any foothold we have."

"I believe I understand, Sir." Marin brushed some frost off of his arm. "And what of the Master Chief?"

"Oh, I've arranged for a friend to visit him. I'm sure he won't survive the day." The Scientist closed the port on the construct as soon as the last wire was secured.

"Very good, then. I shall begin to prepare for immediate departure." Marin turned away, sliding slightly along the cold floor.

"Oh, and Marin?"

Marin turned back to his employer.

Professor Stanwick smiled as he said, "You might want to bring a winter coat."

* * *

><p>...Hi. Sorry for the much longer than usual update, but I managed to get the flu this week, and writing has been utter hell. This chapter might be kinda short and of lesser quality for that reason... then again, it's not like I write quality anyways.

Regardless, I'm not entirely sure when I'll have another chapter up, only because I'm still sick and I have an assignment to do. I'll try to get something out.

C ya.

32. Chapter 32

Chapter 32: Juggernaut

"You know the war council is already going on, right?"

The Master Chief and his team all stood in the corridor that connected all their rooms, each of them making final preparations before moving out to the meeting.

He had tried to get them all to wake up early and get ready then, butâ€| that didn't go so well. His team, the ex-soldier Riven included, were unused to waking in the early hours, so the Chief was forced to sacrifice time now to get them all ready. Riven had complained against it, of course, saying time was a necessity, but the Chief was not going to let his group/team anywhere without proper preparation.

Yasuo was trying to finish strapping his battle rifle to his back. If the Chief was honest with himself, he had no idea why he let Yasuo even carry it with him. Beyond that, he had no idea why Yasuo even _wanted _to carry it. Yasuo had absolutely no idea how to work the thing, and even when he did manage to get it to fire he always complained about the recoil.

Yasuo chose that moment to speak. "Why would the Demacians set up a war council so early in the morning anyways?" he said. "It's like they're trying to make us late."

"Okay, firstly, it's nearly nine in the morning â€| not early," Riven said. "And second, you're the one that insisted on making us wait so you could say good morning to thatâ€| _friend _of yours."

"Maybe nine in the morning is considered early for you battle-crazed Noxians, but it's not to me. And my friend appreciated the greeting."

"It doesn't matter what you consider," Graves said. He was currently loading his spare rounds into a ammo belt. "Nine is early, regardless of where you are."

"For the love of-

"Silence, please," Chief sighed. "I want total silence from here to the war council." The Chief reasoned that while this group of Champions may be his team for the time being, he did not have to " and would not - put up with their attitudes. He would run this like a military operation, just like he had done every other time he had done this kind of stuff. Which was often.

Ten minutes later, the Chief and his rag-tag team were out of the palace and on their way to the war council, which was taking place in a building nearby called the 'Praetorium', an oddly militaristic building in the middle of a bunch of fancy white noble's houses.

To the Chief, is kind of reminded him of home " or at least every UNSC military base he had ever been too. He was not too sure what his actual home looked like " all he knew was that it would now be miles upon miles of glassland.

It was then that, maybe for the first time since landing, he wondered what his acquaintances in the UNSC were doing. Admiral Hood, Halsey" even the Arbiter. He hadn't given it much thought, but he did hope everything was going well. While he was not one-hundred percent sure, he was fairly certain he had ended the war with the battle of the Ark. Even if the war was ended, though, did not necessarily mean peace had been achieved. He could only hope things were going" civilized in his absence.

Yasuo interrupted the Chief's thoughts. "Hey, do you think we have time for breakfast?"

"No," was the Chief's reply, not even sparing him a glance.

"But it smells really good," the Ronin complained, looking at a nearby foodstand.

The Chief froze, causing the inattentive Ronin to slam into him from behind.

"OW!" He yelped, grabbing his nose. "What the hell was that for?"

The Chief turned sharply and gazed into the sky.

The group exchanged looks.

"Uh"Sorry?" Yasuo said, taking two steps back.

The Chief ignored him.

Riven shuffled her feet, and Graves dropped his cigar to the ground before stepping on it. Thresh turned around to gaze at the sky, too.

"Why..." Yasuo stopped mid speech, looking around. "Why is the wind so disturbed here?"

"Take cover," Chief said, swiftly moving to the side. His group responded several seconds later, clumsily but not inadequately.

Less than a minute later, all hell broke loose.

One of Professor Stanwick's pelicans flew over the plaza, its weapons blazing, its armaments highly effective against the primitive architecture and defenses.

There was an explosion of stone as a bullet tore through a decorative arch, sending debris raining down into the street below. Most of the people outdoors began running about, screaming, but it seemed the majority were indoors and asleep in this section of town.

The Chief moved out of cover and began running for the airborne transport, dodging people and rubble as he did so. He could hear his team following behind him.

He turned a corner, and immediately ducked back behind it as a fresh volley of gunfire rained down towards him. The rest of his team came running up at that moment, and the Chief had to hold his arm out to stop them from running right into the street.

"What's wrong?" Graves asked, looking around somewhat frantically.

"The pelican is hovering around the area," was the Chief's curt response. He then tilted his head, for he heard a faint sound that sounded like something unlocking.

The Chief's eyes widened beneath his helmet as he jumped forwards, knocking his team flat to the ground. A second later, the pair of missiles smashed into the building behind them and tore it apart in a fiery conflagration.

Some stray debris rained down on the team, but it wasn't enough to be warranted as deadly. The Chief got back up and, after hearing the whine of thrusters, looked around the now virtually non-existent corner. The Pelican was beginning to rise, for the Demacian military had begun to fire at it with ballistae and catapults. Well, more firing in its general direction than firing at it, but it was a start.

The Chief motioned to his squad to follow him. He began to move through the rubble of the ruined building, which was quite significant. The street was mostly blocked by chunks of fallen masonry and wooden supports, though the latter were on fire.

There was another explosion as the knock-off pelican strafed the area just ahead of the Chief. It seemed that the vehicle was unwilling to hover, sacrificing its accuracy in exchange for the speed it would need to dodge the Demacians projectiles.

Chief jumped over another piece of stone, bounding forwards.

The Pelican dropped down into view all of a sudden, forcing the Chief to dodge back the way he came. Even so, he was hit several times by the Pelican's main armaments, but his shields held.

The other Champions gathered around the Chief as the airborne vehicle began to rise again. Several stray arrows landed around them, flaming.

"What the hell?" exclaimed Graves, looking somewhat depressed without his cigar. "Are they trying to shoot arrows at it now?"

The Chief looked up at the sky, and then back at his team. "Listen," he commanded. "It is a safe to assume that the dropship is targeting me," he said. I want you all to go ahead to the nearest Demacian checkpoint, and tell them to use their siege weapons to pin the vehicle down, not try and hit it."

"Thatâ€¦ makes literally no sense," Yasuo said, deadpanned.

The Chief glanced over a ruined wall, watching the pelican engage a rooftop ballista crew. "I'm going to distract it, and tell the Demacian soldiers to stop it from moving. That's the only way we can take it out without any anti-air weaponry."

"Volume of shots could work," Riven said, trying to brush some dirt off her blade.

The Chief shook his head. "No, it wouldn't. The shots in question move slower than the target, and lack the sufficient force to penetrate it anyways. Now go."

The group did not move, but the Chief already was. He crossed through the ruined building and went onto the street he had been forced to back off previously.

The Pelican spotted him almost immediately, and it peeled off from the ballista crew and began to roar towards him, strafing with its guns.

The Chief dived to the right and came back up again in a roll. The Pelican, moving at speed too high to allow for turning, was forced to make a wide arc over the district in order to refocus on the Chief.

Chief ran over to the left and smashed through some buildings, running inside of them. His plan was to simply throw off the Pelican, forcing into compromising spots as it tried to eliminate the Spartan.

He could hear the Pelican firing its weapons again, but they did not seem to be targeting him or anything near him. Another stray ballista crew, maybe? Hopefully not his team, at least.

The gunfire died off, but the noise of spiraling metal replaced it. The Chief counted to three and then threw himself out of the window to his left as the pair of missiles hit the building, reducing it and the nearby structures to rubble.

The Chief briefly hoped that no one had been inside the buildings before they exploded, and the concentrated fully on outrunning the Pelican's bullets.

It was hard, and many of them hit their mark. The Chief's shields flashed down, nearly empty, forcing him to change his plans up.

He smashed through another building, this one on the far end of the street. He took cover behind a particularly sturdy looking wall as the bullets danced around him. They shredded the inside of what

appeared to be a general store, sending fruit-gore and wooden splinters everywhere.

The bullets abruptly died off, and the Chief could hear the sound of straining engines. He looked behind the pillar where he could see the Pelican struggling to rise as flaming rocks rained down around it. The rocks were not targeting the vehicle; rather, they were impacting points around its general location. It prevented it from maneuvering properly, which was just as the Chief had planned.

The Chief quickly ascended the building, making his own handholds wherever he need to. Once on the roof he jumped to the building next to him, the one with the ballista mounted on top.

Quickly checking that it was loaded " it was " he aimed at the right wing engine of the VTOL, and fired.

The ballista bolt lacked the sufficient velocity and force to penetrate its side or frontal armour, but it was enough to pierce the engine housing and cause some significant damage.

The engine began to trail black smoke, causing the Pelican to list as it continuously tried to rise. More projectiles hit it as it did so, causing minor damage.

The pelican stopped rising, instead using its engine power to keep it afloat. There was a clicking sound as the last of its rockets were freed from their sockets.

The Chief blinked beneath his helmet. The rockets dropped, and then began to speed towards him, trailing white lines.

The Chief prepared to dive, but stopped when he saw a familiar lantern by his feet. He grabbed it, and was immediately pulled away to the roof of a nearby building.

"Thanks," the Spartan said to the chain warden.

Thresh just inclined his head.

"You were supposed to stay with the group," Chief said.

Thresh shrugged. "You needed the help, too. I am the support, after all."

The Chief didn't speak. The Pelican was once again trying to rise, but it was nearly impossible for it to do so. The weight of fire on it had increased significantly, although none of the bullets were any closer to causing terminal damage.

"It looks like it is too heavy to rise," Thresh said. The Chief was inclined to agree. This Pelican did indeed seem to be heavier than the standard Pelican model, which was probably why it was having so much trouble lifting off through the raining chunks of stone and wood.

Almost immediately after the Chief finished that thought, aloud _cachunk_ noise emanated from the drop ship. A set of heavy metal clamps that surrounded the boxy fuselage unlatched themselves and slowly rose back up into the ship. Another pair further down began to

do the exact same thing, causing the fuselage to wobble a bit.

Except it was not fuselage. Unless fuselage in this world had six legs and a rotary cannon, that is.

The mechanical creature fell to the ground with a loud thump, cracking the stone floor beneath its legs.

The Chief and Thresh did not move from their spots.

Neither did the Mech. It waited there as the Pelican began to gain height. It seemed its problem had just been its heavy load.

As soon as the pelican cleared the rooftops it began to boost forwards, seemingly leaving the city airspace and its cargo behind.

The cargo in question began to move again. It stretched each of its legs out, and slowly raised its bulky body off the ground. The storm-grey metal plates that covered the walking tank began to shift around, clanking and sliding into new positions, causing the tank to look less bulky than before. The tank's rotary-barreled cannon was mounted atop its segmented shell armour, and as the stalker-tank rose it spun to life, tight arcs of green lighting sparking around it.

"That can't be good," Thresh said, winding his scythe.

Reinforcements chose that moment to storm into the plaza: nearly a company of roaring, blue-clothed and silver-armoured Demacian soldiers, all running full speed towards the tank.

The Chief had to commend them for their bravery; they didn't even hesitate to charge the unknown beast.

The tank turned, its heavy clanking legs making the action slow. It didn't wait until it had the Demacians in its sights to shoot, rather, it began to fire well before. The cannon spun slowly, each shot tearing through the pavement like a missile rather than a bullet.

To the Chief, it seemed more like a revolver than a Gatling gun – slower firing, but with more potent munitions.

For the Demacians, the shots were more than enough. As soon as the cannon lined up with their battle line it began tearing holes in it, sending broken bodies flying and dropping dozens of soldiers.

"We should try and help them, should we not?" Thresh asked, his voice neutral but obviously doubtful.

The Chief grabbed his assault rifle from his back. "We lack anything with enough force to penetrate its shell," he stated. Well, his plasmas might work, but he was a little doubtful.

He turned and began to reload the ballista, thinking that perhaps he could strap a plasma to the end and launch it into the weakest point of the armoured shell – not that he knew where that would

be.

"â€|This just got a lot worse," Thresh sighed.

The Chief looked up, and beheld the remaining members of his team in the center battle line, sheltered from the raining shells by a wind wall.

The Chief sighed audibly. He turned to Thresh and pointed to the ballista. "Fire this," he said. "Aim for the legs." With that, he jumped off the roof.

His feet pounded across the open ground as ran full speed to the stalker-tank. He prepped a plasma with one hand and kept his AR in the other, prepared to use both in order to test this new enemies' capabilities.

He used one of its legs to boost himself onto the top of its armoured shell, and began to fire down.

The bullets simply ricochet off the shell, making no visible impact in the armour. The tank itself didn't even shift, the bullets probably completely beneath its notice.

And that brought up another problem. Was this tank operated by humans, or was it a mech like the others? A completely mechanical tank would require a different approach than a driven one, and the Chief wasn't sure he would be able to deal with the former.

The stalker-tank began to move forwards, firing, and the Chief was forced to use the plasma. He threw it at the main cannon, seeing it as the weakest point, before launching himself of the thing.

He dove towards the wind wall as the grenade exploded. The tank stopped firing, the gun now more heavily distorted than before â€" but it looked like it would still be able to fire in a few minutes time.

"Regroup!" shouted the Chief, standing in the midst of his team. "Regroup and make for cover! You cannot hurt this foe!"

The Demacians began to scramble around, making for the ruined buildings nearby as the stalker began to pound its legs into the ground.

"Shit, Chief, what the hell is that thing?" Yasuo said. The Chief took it as a rhetorical question, and did not answer.

The tank began to shift its legs in front of itself, making a sort of wall around the barrel of the gun. The armoured plates began to shift around, fanning out around the cannon, and energy began to spark from the plates' edges towards the barrel. Green energy began to collect at the tip with a whine.

"â€| We should move," Graves said around his cigar.

The Chief nodded, and began to run back towards where reinforcements had come from. As soon as they reached the buildings, the whine reached its crescendo and green energy blasted forth, destroying the cobblestone beneath their feet.

The Chief was launched forwards and smashed into the intact stone wall, sending blocks down everywhere. The ground where they had been running before was cratered, smoke curling out.

Someone groaned beside the Chief. He looked over and saw Riven, soot-covered but still alive.

She tried to reach for her sword, but the Chief motioned her down. "Don't," he said. "Get somewhere safe." With that he took off, running forwards into a better position.

He crouched behind a ruined wall, watching the tank try and rise back up. The energy that was crackling around it a moment before seemed to have faded away, but the rotary cannon was spinning again.

He knew it was impossible for anything to be invulnerable, but he wasn't sure where its weakness could be. Maybe some place where the ammunition was stored? Not its legs, certainly. He could see Thresh's ballista bolts snapped on the ground beside it, not even one having managed to pierce it.

Riven slammed into the wall beside the Chief, also looking out at the tank with her sword raised.

"I said to get somewhere safe," Chief told her. Some dust rained down from the ceiling and landed on his armour before being burned away.

"I am. The safest place around here is right next you," she responded with. Her grip on her blade tightened.

The plates of armour on the tank began to shift again, re-arranging again so that it covered the tank completely.

"I have an idea," Chief said. He looked at Riven. "I need you to use your blade to create that power wave, and launch it towards the cannon."

Riven nodded shakily. "What're you going to do?"

The Chief, in classic Chief fashion, did not respond. He set off, running through the ruined buildings, keeping out of sight.

Riven powered up her blade and ran out into the open street, staring down the tank.

The barrel began to rotate faster, but Riven unleashed her blades' energy before the first shots left the barrel. The wind slash smashed against the frontal armour of the tank, but even that was unable to do more than cut glowing lines into it.

However, it was enough to cause the tank to once again shift its plates and legs, shifting back into the stance it had used earlier. Energy began to collect again, the whine signaling impending doom.

The Spartan ran out into the street, running behind the stalker-tank. The plates had all fanned out, leaving the back less protected. The Chief prepped a plasma grenade and threw it, watching it latch onto

the weaker rear armour of the vehicle.

It detonated, blasting a large hole in its carapace and causing the built up energy to spiral uncontrollably.

The tank began to stumble as power began to flee from its systems. Even so, it was not done yet. It began to turn, trying to get a bead on the Chief. Its piston-driven legs punched through the ground as it tried to kill the thing that had caused it harm.

The Chief, however, was on step ahead. The hole he had created revealed that the tank was indeed an automaton, so that meant a properly placed electro-magnetic pulse could take it down. Not that he had an EMP handy, but he did have something similar enough.

Chief quickly overcharged his shields as the tank lined itself up with him. The Spartan punched, and detonated his shields at the same time.

The static discharge traveled over the tank, seemingly ineffective, until it reached the exposed area. There was an explosion, and then several secondary ones along it's flanks, before it crashed down abruptly, like a puppet with its strings cut " which was essentially what had just happened.

Static still played along the thing's armoured plates, but it appeared to be dead. The Chief fired a burst into it just to be sure, but there was no movement.

Riven walked up to him, as did the rest of his team. All were alive, but soot-covered and slightly burned. The Demacians began to crawl out of cover, each one looking either shocked, awed or a combination of the two.

They started cheering less than a minute later.

* * *

><p>Jarvan IV stood atop the steps to the war building, looking mad " or possible impressed. "Quite a way to make an entrance," he said, indicating the crowds of soldiers.<p>

The Chief shrugged.

"I had wanted to join the charge," the prince continued, "But my advisors here told me not to."

The Chief looked at Garen and Xin Zhao, who were standing just a little ways behind the prince. Presumably, they were the advisors.

"That was wise of them," the Chief said. "The enemy was tough."

Jarvan inclined his head. "So I have heard."

There was a minute of silence before Jarvan waved the Chief inside the structure. The Chief turned to his team and told them to get some rest, seeing as how they were all looking rather beat.

He entered the building behind Jarvan, and the advisors trailed just behind them. The entrance led directly into the war room, which was essentially a big room with a map in it.

Pretty much the same as every other war room the Chief had been in, really.

Jarvan walked right up to the map-table, where three other generals and their advisors were standing.

"What was that all about?" one of them asked. "Was it a Noxian attack?"

Jarvan shook his heads. "Our friend Stanwick brought us a present," he said. "One of his flying boats and some large insect, according to the reports."

"It was a dropship and its cargo was a walking heavy vehicle," Chief clarified.

The generals exchanged looks. "We need to mount more defenses, in case of another attack. Several more batteries of ballistae would suffice."

Chief shook his head. "Your siege weaponry is unable to cause direct harm to the vehicles â€" unless you happen to have any trebuchets. Their heavy armour is proof to anything else."

"Then you did you do it?" one of the generals asked, leaning on the table.

"The drop ship left once it came under concentrated fire. It lacks maneuverability, and I don't think Stanwick has enough of them to throw them away in suicide assaults. This one was just here to deliver its cargo."

The Chief moved beside the table, and looked down at it. "The stalker-tank, on the other hand, its impervious to you soldiers weaponry and your heavier weaponry, too. It seems to be vulnerable from the rear when it fires itâ€| hextech blast, so any damage to that area should be sufficient to disable it."

The generals stared at him.

"Well, there you have it," Jarvan stated. "A way to defeat the monstrosities. Now let us go over the battle plan, hm?"

The generals continued staring.

"We have roughly three armies' worth of troops ready to move, and it would only take us a day to march to our destination. However, we have no idea how to effectively assault their forces in Kalamanda â€" after all, they beat our last army." Jarvan was moving some of the pieces around the map as he talked.

One of the generals in red armour spoke. "We have, roughly, two regiments of spearmen, one regiment of swordsmen, one regiment of archers, a single company of royal guards, a battalion of horsemen and several batteries of siege weapons."

"I know how I would deploy them," Jarvan said, "But it would be ineffective against an enemy that does not have morale to break, a rearguard to penetrate, or a leader to kill."

The Chief shook his head. "They do, but it's just harder to find. The mechs are directly controlled by humans â€" probably augmented ones. Without their human commanders, they need to resort to base programming, which is far more inefficient."

"â€|I see," a general in pearl-lined gold armour said.

"Swordsmen and spearmen will be effective enough once they reach close quarters, but until then gunfire will take them down easily enough. They'll need to advance under the cover of siege weapon fire."

"What about the archers?" another general asked.

The Chief stared at the map, but in actuality he was accessing his somewhat poor database on the mechs. "Archers will be ineffective in companies," he said. "Volleys won't deter this enemy â€"their armour is focused on the front, and their weakest point is on their backs."

Jarvan re-arranged some pieces. "And if we send them in groups, on high ground? Use them as hunter squads?"

The red general nodded. "That would work, especially on the rooftops. Although we would be losing cover fire."

"What about the horses?" asked Jarvan. "The Mechs will not be routed with a single charge, rather, they would just regroup."

The Chief thought for a moment. "The horses can be used as a reserve force," he said. Have them be a mobile battle group that can reinforce sections of the assault that encounter heavy resistance."

The generals all nodded as Jarvan moved the horseman pieces around.

The Chief tilted his head. "We can attack on two fronts. Here," he pointed to the front of Kalamnda, "and here." He pointed to the left of Kalamnda. "This way we can split their forces and drive to the center."

"What about the other flanks? There will be virtually no pressure there," the last general chimed in.

Chief shook his head. "That does not matter. The focus of their operation is on the crystal scar, the center of the city. We push through to their, clear that area out, and kill any of their leadership we find. Objective complete."

Jarvan nodded. "I agree with this plan. What about â€" "

"Sirs!" a messenger ran into the room, along with High Councilor Kolminye.

"Report," Garen said, intercepting the messenger.

The messenger waved a sealed letter around. "This just arrived from Avarosa by messenger birdâ€¦ They are under attack!"

* * *

><p>The Chief walked forwards with heavy footsteps. The High Councilor had trouble keeping up with him. His squad, wellâ€¦ they had lagged behind minutes ago, and did not appear to be catching up any time soon.<p>

"I can only wonder as to how an army came upon the avarosians without so much as a word of warning. Furthermore, I do not understand how my Summoners posted there were incapacitated!" the High Councilor raged. This news had taken her by storm, too, and it did not bode well for anyone. The loss of the northern colonies would be, according to Kolminye, a massive disaster.

"Spartan!"

The Chief did not turn around when he heard the prince of Demacia's voice ring out.

A few bounds later the prince was in step with them. "What do you plan on doing?"

"I intend to relieve the Freljord."

"What?!" the prince cried, before recovering his composure. "I would be the first to ride to their aid, but it is quite far and we would not make it in time. And we have another attack already planned out. Mostly."

"I'll take my team and go help them," said the Chief. "We can get there faster than you. Just march your army to Kalamanda and set up. That is still the primary objective."

Jarvan stopped. "As much as I would love to attack by myself, we cannot. We have no knowledge of this enemy, and even I would be willing to admit they are out of my league. We need you there."

The Chief stopped and looked back. "Give us one day. From now until tomorrow at the same time. If we are not there, follow the plan exactly. You can pull it off."

Jarvan blinked, and then started laughing. "You are one ballsy man, Master Chief."

"I will relieve your allies, and hopefully provide some reinforcements for the coming fight." The Chief looked to the sky. "Or draw new allies to our cause."

Jarvan was shaking his head now, still chuckling to himself.

_Must run in he family, _The Chief thought as he resumed walking, allowing Jarvan IV to laugh to his heart's content.

"Sorry, but just how do you plan on getting there?" Kolminye asked. "I have already said we cannot summon you there."

"You won't be summoning us there; you will be summoning us to the League."

Kolminye frowned and shook her head. "Why?"

"We have a ride there."

* * *

><p>"â€|Chief?" Vi sounded surprised. "I didn't expect you back so soon."<p>

The Chief and his team stood in a ragged circle around Vi, who was holding a toolbox and a bunch of rags. "I take it that means you are not done yet?" he asked.

Vi shook her head. "Nope, not at all. No, wait, I mean yes." She scratched her head. "Iâ€| whatever, the thing you asked for is all prepped and ready to go."

The Chief nodded his head, and Vi waved them all over into the plaza.

The thing that Vi had been working on was indeed done. It was a Pelican dropship, one of the ones Stanwick's forces had brought to the Institute of War before Chief had subsequently bombed it out of the sky.

Only it was as good as new. Mostly. Most of the paintjob was burned off, revealing the steel-grey armour in some places and black patches in others.

Vi rubbed her hands together. "It's quite a beauty, if I do say so myself."

"Thanks," Chief said. "I'll be needing it now, though."

Yasuo broke off from the group and ran towards the vehicle, for some odd reason.

Vi pouted. "But I didn't even get to make any modifications yet."

"If the Spartan needs it, he needs it," said a new voice.

The Chief turned around as Kayle emerged from the shadows of the plaza, resplendent in her gold armour, her white wings folded across her back.

The Chief inclined his head in greeting.

"I just wanted to say good luck," Kayle said. "I will be accompanying Kolminye to the field of battle, and I shall await your return eagerly."

"The High Councilor is gunna fight?" Graves said with a frown.

"Of course. The job of the League is to keep the peace, after all."

The Chief nodded, and after a moment's hesitation, held out his hand for the angel to shake. She took it and shook it a little too enthusiastically.

"Can we go now? Please?" called Yasuo from the inside of the ship. Less than a second later there was the sound of something falling and shattering. "Mother fu-"

Riven laughed and Thresh chuckled.

The Master Chief did not, but a smile crept onto his lips although it was hidden by his helmet.

"All aboard," he ordered, and the group gathered into the pelican.

"But I really wanted to make modifications," Vi whined to no one in particular.

* * *

><p>It took me far longer to upload than expected, so sorry. Just... sickness and projects are like oil and water. Or fire and water.

I tried to write a chapter in which the Master Chief fights something he can't just run at shooting and come out on top, so tell me if I achieved that - probably not, though.

Ah well. Merry Christmas everybody, hopefully I get a chapter out before New Years.

33. Chapter 33

Chapter 33: But I Don't Want To Ride The Elevator!

"Can I fly it now?" asked Yasuo for the millionth and a half time.

The answer was the same as the other million times. "No."

The Master Chief was in the pilot seat of the pelican, flying it full-speed towards avarosian territory. The ship was fast, and it had only taken them several hours to get into the Freljord although a journey that would have taken several days on horseback.

"This is hell," Graves said from the back. He was the only one on the ship that was not enjoying the flight, and was very vocal about it.

The Chief tensed up as their goal came into view. Riven clutched the back of his chair a little bit tighter, and Yasuo gripped his swords' hilt.

The city of Avarosa was burning. Its ice-covered foundations were aflame, the fires reaching up towards the sky. The ice walls surrounding the city had been breached in multiple places, but there was still fighting along the battlements.

"â€|They're getting smashed," Yasuo muttered. Riven agreed with him.

The Chief sent the pelican into a shallow dive towards the city. "Everyone, get ready," Chief called out. "I'm clearing a landing zone and then we are moving out."

"Shit," Yasuo sighed as he moved into the other compartment, "I didn't even get to fly this thing."

"I don't think Chief was going to let someone who can't even handle a rifle fly the ship," Riven said in a singsong voice.

Surprisingly, the Chief agreed with Riven completely. The turbulence on a pelican was more than the kick of a battlerifle for sure, and the Ronin had yet to master the kick.

Several flaming projectiles flashed by the glass in front of the Chief, and he tilted the pelican accordingly, effectively avoiding the projectiles. He continued the dive again, but opened up with the chin-mounted machineguns. They shot a hail of lethal projectiles directly in front of the dropship, eviscerating anything that was caught in their path â€" mostly footsoldiers of some tribe or another.

Several of the tribe warriors tried to throw spears up at the passing ship, but they all bounced harmlessly off its flanks. The Chief ignored them as best as he could, using the underslung machineguns to clear only things directly in front of him.

Chief pulled up a bit and began to circle, looking for an area that was large enough to land in.

There.

He flew forwards, keeping the trigger held down until he was hovering directly over where he wanted to be. He had the pelican hover for several moments just to get his bearings before he landed it.

"Spartan, why don't we just keep flying and shooting?" Thresh asked. "Would it not be more effective?"

"Oh, please noâ€|," Graves muttered beneath his breath.

"Not enough fuel," Chief responded with. He grabbed his DMR â€" he had traded out the AR for this mission- and opened the rear hatch.

As soon as it was fully lowered, a mob of enemy soldiers appeared, running at the ship as fast as they could.

"Look, it's the welcoming committee," Riven said, smirking.

"Where?" asked Yasuo, earning him a cuff from Graves.

The Chief raised his rifle and began shooting, each bullet finding the head of an enemy. He continued to move forwards while shooting, each shot a footstep. He would not allow them to gain any ground on him.

Graves joined in several seconds later, his shotgun ringing out with every buckshot it fired.

The mob was large, though, and the guns of two people were not enough to eliminate them all completely. They reached close-combat range within seconds, forcing Graves to spin back and take cover behind Riven and Yasuo.

The Chief did no such thing, instead taking to the offensive immediately, laying waste to all around him with the butt of his rifle. Thresh dropped his lantern to help shield the Chief from return blows, but the weapons of their enemies were little better than sharpened rocks and they did nothing to him. Beside him, Riven and Yasuo began to stab and hack at them as well.

In less than a minute, the rest of the horde had been annihilated.

"Nice warmup," Riven said as she swung her blade around to work out some of the tension the flight had built up in her shoulders.

The Chief reloaded his weapon, making sure to keep the empty magazine for use later. "Graves and Yasuo, your job is to clear out the siege engines threatening the city. Thresh, I want you to go straight to the palace and tell whoever is in charge that reinforcements have arrived."

Yasuo and Graves started running, their feet leaving impressions on the bloodstained snow. Thresh moved out too, but he moved at a calmer pace.

"We're finding and killing the person in charge," Chief said, answering Riven's question before she had the time to speak it.

They set off at a brisk pace, moving towards the walls that surrounded the city.

"Quick question," Riven said while panting, "Why did we land so far away if we're trying to kill the leader? Wouldn't he be in the very back?"

Chief shook his head. "Doubtful. Their tactics seem to be more all-in than conservative." He didn't bother mentioning the fact that landing an air vehicle close to enemy forces would be stupid. Then again, they had been attacked within seconds of landing, soâ€

Another squad of tribesmen turned the corner, but they were all killed before they could land a blow on the pair. It seemed that 'skill' was not one of the fortes of the enemy.

"I thought all the discord in the Freljord was gone," Riven said. "I thought all the tribes were in a state of relative peace."

The Chief paused to eliminate a pair of mechs on the roof of a nearby building. "They don't have the sufficient numbers to prosecute a war by themselves, so they are using existing rivalries against us."

"I got that part, butâ€ ah, forget it."

A burning stone impacted the building not ten paces from the pair, melting through the ice covering it and sending splinters through the air.

"And seriously, who builds a city of ice?" Riven complained as the ice-shards shot towards her.

Chief pulled her out of the way and continued moving. A few minutes later, they found themselves in a long, wide street where avarosian soldiers fought blade-to-blade with tribesmen and mechs.

Chief grunted. "The mechs are all the way in the back lines," he said. "The enemy is using their allies as meatshields."

Riven gripped her sword tighter. "Okay, then you take out the mechs while I kill the ice-guys."

Chief was already moving before she had finished the sentence, for he had seen one of the ranger automatons bring a flamethrower to bear. The last thing he needed was that "a sheet of flame rippling through a city of ice.

He smashed through the foot soldiers and leaped towards the flamethrower wielder, his fist at the ready. He drove his armoured gauntlet through its head, killing it immediately.

The rangers were fast, though. They reacted immediate, one bringing its energized blade-arm around in an arc for the Chief's head. The Chief took a step back, allowing the mech's momentum to carry it forward several steps before flattening its head with his fist.

Another ranger lunged, and the Chief stepped back to avoid the blow. Another thrust came from the mech to his left, forcing the Chief back again.

A third lunge, but this time the Chief grabbed the arm that the blade was attached to and pulled, ripping it out. The injured mech skipped back in order to bring its gun arm to bear.

The Chief gave it no time. He drew his own blade in his free hand and stabbed it into the ranger's chest, stopping it dead. He then ripped the blade out in an arc, catching the two automatons advancing on the right and slicing them in half.

Another two came at him from the front, but he ducked under the arm of the first and spun around the second before eliminating them both with a single cut down their torsos.

After looking around and confirming that the last of the rangers were dead "or inactive, - the Chief sheathed his sword.

"Cold and war is a terrible combination," Riven said as she slid her blade out of a tribesman's corpse.

The Chief did not respond. All the enemies in the area were slain, allowing the avarosian soldiers some respite.

The Chief and Riven continued on, making their way through the streets, eliminating stragglers and entire squads as they came upon

them.

They stopped at a small hill which offered a slightly better view of the city. Directly in front of them were the walls surrounding the city, each one rather large and " unsurprisingly " covered in ice. There was a large breach in the area that may have once been the gatehouse, but was now a pile of rubble. Barley a company's worth of avarosian spearmen were trying to stop the enemy from advancing through, but it seemed they were experiencing little success.

The Chief turned to Riven. "Go down there and hold the line."

Riven blinked. "Um" there are a dozen other holes in the wall, holding this one won't make much of a difference."

The Chief shook his head. "Their leader isn't at any of the other breaches," he said, pointing to the top of what remained of the gatehouse where a single black flag flew. "And I don't need reinforcements rushing up to him."

"Ok, I got it," Riven said before running down the hill.

The wind began to pick up, blowing snow around. The Chief moved quick, using the swirling snow as cover. Not that he expected anything to ambush him at this point, but it was habit.

As he drew closer to the wall the combat intensified. A large amount of enemy soldiers had gotten through already and the only thing keeping them back from the city proper were small squads of soldiers, laying down their lives to stop the advance.

The Chief quickly tore through each enemy he found, reverting from his old tactics of shoot-run-cover to his even older tactics of run-shoot-charge.

A tribesman thrust a spear towards the Chief, but it was quickly snapped in half before being thrust back into its wielder. Another tried to slash at the Spartan with his curved sword, but found himself without a head a heartbeat later.

The tribesmen backed off, trying to keep a safe distance between them and the Spartan, which in turn allowed the avarosians to regroup.

The Chief moved away from that battle, quickly jogging up the steps that led to the top of the wall. Time was of the essence, after all, and he couldn't allow himself to be tied down by the foot-soldiers below.

There were bodies from both sides lying across the stairs, but there was surprisingly little blood around them. Not that it mattered much, but the Chief took note of every detail while on the battlefield.

His sensors pinged as it registered movement above him. Six dots, each one heading towards the top of the stairs.

The Chief decided to get there first, so he began to sprint the last few steps. As soon as he reached the top he turned and let out precisely six shots, each one felling a ranger.

Chief gave the slightest of glances around the area, just enough to see where he was. The walls were fairly wide, and wouldn't be a problem for the Chief to fight on. The other side of the wall was the open battlefield outside of the city, which seemed to be very one sided.

Not that that mattered. The Chief knew he could end the battle right now as he eyed the leader of the enemy forces. He raised his DMR and fired, which the man promptly dodged.

The Chief tightened his finger on the trigger again, but the man seemed to want to take the imitative and charged the Chief, drawing a long blade from a leg sheath. The Chief had just enough time to snap off two more shots, one miss and one glance, before the man was in striking range.

The Chief lifted his marksman rifle just in time to block the blow from the cleaving falchion. While the moment was brief, the Chief had just enough time to see who his opponent was and what that signified for him.

It was the man in black from the raid on the institute. Granted, he wasn't wearing all black now since he had a grey winter coat on, but it was still the same person. And the last time he they had fought, the Chief hadn't come out on top.

This would be interesting.

The man quickly disengaged before coming back in with a low stab, which the Chief once again tried to counter with his firearm. The man shifted at the last second, his stab having been a fight, the real blow aimed for the unarmoured gap between the Chief's chest and shoulder.

But the Chief had seen the feint for what it was, and he sidestepped the slash before lashing out with the butte of his rifle and catching the man in his armoured midsection.

The man was forced back a few steps, the pain from the blow being the only thing to hold him back. His armour would have taken the brunt of the impact; if anything, he would have a bruise in the morning.

It had accomplished what the Chief had intended, though: it had given him enough time to put away his DMR and draw his sword. While he was all for ranged combat, he wasn't about to bring a gun to a sword fight against an enemy that was seemingly resistant to his bullets.

The man gave a chuckle, or it could have been wheezing. The Chief wasn't too sure about those kinds of things.

"We have a duel, then," the man in black said.

The Chief nodded.

Twirling his blade around, the man said, "I am Marin. I am sure you will be happy to know the name of the man that will kill you."

Chief said nothing.

Silence.

Marin surged towards the Chief, and the Spartan responded with a side slash that would have devastated Marin's upper body had he still been there.

Marin dropped to the floor just before the blade connected and slide towards the Chief before lifting himself up and stabbing forwards. The Chief ducked back just in time to avoid the worst of the blow, but it grazed his shields.

The Chief responded with a left hook, forcing Marin to duck, before following up with a stab.

Marin parried the blow easily, and tried to retaliate with a downwards slash. The Chief stepped back, causing Marin to misstep, and then he slashed wide.

The man in black was far faster than the Chief had expected, though, and he jumped over the blade as it passed. The Chief's blade instead hit the frozen battlements, sending a massive crack along a meter long section, before becoming stuck.

Marin landed and delivered a series of punishing jabs towards the Chief, which he was forced to parry with his fists. His shield started to drain under the repeated impacts, so the Chief was forced to change up his tactics.

He dropped and rolled the right before body tackling his opponent.

The only reason the tactic worked was because of how unexpected it was. Marin had no time to dodge or move his blade around as the Chief smashed against him, but he was able to prevent himself from being pushed into the ground.

The Chief drew back his fist and slammed it into his targets chest, earning a grunt of pain for his efforts. The man tried to retaliate by bringing his blade around, but the Chief simply disengaged and let the man swipe at empty air.

The Chief quickly ripped his sword free of its icy confines, sending more cracks running along the icy stone as he did so. Marin was wheezing several meters away.

The Spartan took a step back, prompting Marin to re-engage the fight. The man was far faster than he had been before, though, and his slash went right through the Chief's guard and impacted against his already damaged shields, draining them in an instant.

Chief ducked under the next blow and stabbed outwards with his blade. The blade sunk itself into Marin's left arm, which had the enemy roar in pain.

He slashed at the Chief again, but the Spartan intercepted the blow with his left arm. The blade cut shallowly into the metal covering his forearm, not even close to penetrating the flesh beneath.

The Chief gave a grunt as he shifted his stance, and Marin realized

what he was about to do. He quickly tried to disengage, but the Chief's sword was keeping him pined into place.

Without a sound, the Chief tossed Marin aside, removing his blade from Marin's arm as he did so.

Marin did not make a sound as he hit the already weakened ice battlement, his weight and the force shattering it.

Neither did he make a sound as he began to fall off the battlements, chunks of stone and splinters of ice falling in his wake.

He didn't even make a sound as he slammed into the ground and the stone smashed into his body, the icy splinters hitting a second later.

In fact, the entire time, Marin had been smiling.

But the Chief didn't know this. He stood atop the battlements, his red stained sword in his fist, as he watched the leader of the enemy forces die below him. After a minute of watching to make sure his target really was dead, he moved towards the flag that had been hastily erected and cut it down with a sweep of his blade.

He sheathed his blade and took out his marksman rifle, staring out at the city below him. Despite the fact that the leader of the enemy forces had been slain, he knew they were not defeated yet. Disorganized, yes. Without a goal, yes. Without a battle plan, yes. But not yet defeated.

The Chief gave a little sigh as he set off, running along the walls. The first thing he would need to do is secure the rest of the battlements before he could go about exterminating the enemy.

* * *

><p>"So there he is," Tryndemere said as the Master Chief walked into the grand hall of the Avarosian palace.<p>

Graves, Yasuo and Thresh were already there, standing near the King and Queen. Riven was somewhere still outside, mopping up any survivors.

The Chief nodded in greeting. His armour was even more beat up than before, with the paint completely scrapped off in places and large dents and rents in others. If the Chief was being perfectly honest with himself, he wasn't sure it was going to last the rest of the war.

Tryndemere stomped up to the Chief. "So you're the I hafta' thank for stealing my glory, huh?"

Ashe sighed from her spot several meters away.

Tryndamere's shoulders slumped a bit as he said, "Joking, joking&€|geez." He held his hand out to the Spartan. "Thanks for the save."

The Chief gingerly took the man's hand and shook it, noting the fresh scares, bruises and blood covering his body. He appeared to have been

in the thick of the fighting.

"Would it not have been more effective to wear body armour?" the Chief asked, genuinely curious.

Tryndamere chuckled. "That takes the fun away. And it slows me down."

The Chief tilted his head a bit, and looked down at his hand, slowly clenching it and unclenching it. He didn't feel any slower. In fact, he knew for certain that the suit made him fast to the point where he could hurt himself " severely.

"Well anyways, thank you." Ashe had come up beside the Chief and bowed respectfully towards him.

"Iâ€| itâ€| you welcome?" The Chief was somewhat confused. Generally speaking, he didn't receive thanks for when he fought. The fact that he had received thanks was just a little bit new and disconcerting.

"We will have to rebuild, and that will take long, but at least we have something to rebuild." Some of the door pounded their spear hafts against the ground at Ashe's words, possibly in respect or assent. The Chief wasn't too sure.

"Well, we hate to be the bringers of bad news," Graves drawled, "But the entire continent is in the same position."

Tryndamere looked at them with a frown. The Chief decided that he should clarify.

"Major attacks have been going on, and Demacia has prepared a counter-attack against the enemy's staging area." The Chief glanced around. "We had hoped you would be able to join us, but we understand the position you are in and-"

"Give us a week," Ashe interrupted. "We'll reorganize and negotiate with the other tribes before sending our forces down to help."

"You areâ€| sure?" the Chief asked. He knew this was not the UNSC, and so he was surprised the queen would so willingly move from one battle to the next like a marine would.

Tryndamere answered for her. "Of course. We can't stand up a good fight. Plus, I'm really pissed at these guys and would love the chance to punch them in the face."

"Well, there'll be plenty o' face punching where we're headed," Graves chuckled.

The Chief shuffled as he remembered something. "Speaking of places we are headed, we have to be headed back now. There is battle going on that we must be in."

Ashe frowned. "Leaving so soon? We owe you a feast in your honour, at the very least."

Yasuo started drooling at the mouth at the thought of food.

"We cannot, and I apologize." The Chief gestured to his companions to follow him. "And we really must be going."

"Leave some for us, then, huh?" Tyrndamere said sarcastically.

The Master Chief shrugged. "No promises."

* * *

><p>So... yeah, sorry for the wait. At least I got it out before the new year, though, so that's something.

**On another note, I don't really know when I can update again. See, yesterday I was told I was going on vacation. Tomorrow. I have yet to pack, and don't know where i'm going, either. **

**+1 for forgetful people. **

Anyways, Happy New Year to everyone who reads this (The whole five people), and I wish you well.

34. Chapter 34

Chapter 34: Bottom floor: Cafeteria, Washrooms, Keys to Super weapons

The Battle for Kalamanda, part 1

"First rank, push!"

The air was filled with the ringing noises of metal striking metal, the booming of gunfire, the snapping of siege weapons, the screams of the dying and soon-to-be dead. The shouted command was just audible over the din, and with the soldierly precision expected of Demacia, the spearmen began to push forwards in unison against their metal assailants.

The battle had begun nearly an hour before, just as the sun began to waver in the sky. Jarvan Lightshield IV, Prince of Demacia and warleader of the host, had decided it was then or never. They had tried waiting out for their Champion reinforcements, but they hadn't been able to afford to wait any longer. The main fear had been a counter-attack in the middle of the night, when visibility was low and the men would be drowsy â€" something that their mechanical foe would be unaffected by. And so, confident with their plan and with a feeling of invincibility around them, the Demacians had begun the war.

But a feeling of invincibility was not the real thing â€" nothing like the real thing at all, as they learned to great cost. The automatons had put up resistance as initially assumed, firing from the outlying buildings and barricades, while any mechs caught out in the open running for cover in the face of the vastly larger Demacian host. While casualties had been sustained, it was all within expected and acceptable margins and so the advance continued, right into the outer districts of Kalamanda.

The outer districts were in less than pristine condition, to say the least. While the buildings were still mostly intact, there were

pieces of wood and random rubble scattered about, in addition to the barricades set up in strategic firing lanes. The Demacian army was well trained, however, and they pushed on right through and continued to chase the retreating foe. Archers quickly separated from their blocks and scattered onto the roofs of the buildings, shooting arrows into the foe. Blue-clad spearmen and swordsmen split off into squads which were much better suited for urban combat than the large rank and file regiments they had arrived in.

Then the enemy began their attack in earnest.

Archers, who had been strategically positioned to achieve maximum effectiveness from their weapons, found themselves being speared through by bright beams of light. The enemy was a new type of mech, wielding a long-ranged weapon more akin to a sniper rifle than the automatic rifles of the foot soldiers. Not only did they shoot the archers, but they used their superior precision weapons to snipe Demacian officers off the field of battle. The archers, realizing the threat of the sniper automatons, began a battle on the rooftops against their newly appeared foe, ignoring the streets below.

It was at this time, when the archers were no longer providing cover fire and the Demacian soldiers were in disarray, that the third type of Mech made its appearance.

They lumbered onto the battlefield with less grace than their footsoldier counterparts. Where the sniper mechs were slender and lithe, the new ones were large, bulky, heavily armoured, and lumbering. They sported a crest above their domed head, and their shoulder armour swept back elegantly. They also carried red one sided blades, the length of a man's arm and with a hilt just as long.

With the Demacian soldiers scattered and disorganized as a result of their sniped sergeants, they were easy pickings for the new foe. They crashed into the hastily-assembled battle lines, the shields and blades of the Demacians unable to offer much resistance to the scything blades.

All the Demacian soldiers that had pushed into Kalamanda found themselves suddenly being brutally and viciously pushed back. The little ground they had gained was almost totally lost, all the blood their comrades had spilled for it, wasted.

The blue-clothed soldiers fell back in an orderly fashion, regrouping with surviving command members and, as ordered by the generals, tried to make a defensive perimeter in the most open spaces. In response the ranger automatons also began to reform, gathering around their larger melee cousins.

It was around this time that the generals realized that the battle had just taken on a much different mood. Whereas before victory had been assured, now there was a large uncertainty. It was decided by Jarvan that he and two other generals would personally take to the field of battle while one stayed behind, read to issue new orders while the others led from the front.

And so that was how Jarvan found himself in the thick of the fighting. Naturally, Garen had complained from the very first moment he heard the plan, but in the end he had followed the prince with the Dauntless Vanguard behind him.

The sound of metal shearing tore Jarvan away from his thoughts. At the first rank of troops were being torn apart by the larger mechs, although the Demacians gave no ground, which made Jarvan proud.

"Second rank, fill gaps!" he shouted again, and men from the second rank pushed forward into openings caused by the automatons.

"Push!" he shouted. "Two steps!"

With a loud huff, the entire front line pushed forwards one step. Spearmen in the back rows made use of the temporarily gained ground to stab fallen enemies, help others to their feet, and generally reform ranks. Several seconds later, the line pushed again, their metal shields grinding against metal bodies.

The melee mechs were not daunted by the show of force, however. They continued to use their great blades, using either one hand or both of them to scythe the blade around in arcs. Each slash cut down two soldiers as easily as a hot knife passing through butter. The spearmen tried to fight back, tried to stab their opponents and kill them, but their spears seemed to bounce off their armour.

Jarvan gave a slight grimace, and glanced back at the Vanguard. Clearly the normal soldiers and their gear were unable to deal with these enhanced automatons, but the elite bodyguards would be more than able to deal with them " theoretically, anyways.

"All ranks, split!" The prince shouted loudly. In quick response, the ordered soldiers split along their center line, tilting their shields to protect their flanks as well as their front.

Jarvan, naturally, charged first, his spear low and as he shouted his war cry. Jarvan counted a cap of two seconds before the Dauntless Vanguard took up the cry as they charged after their leader.

While there was a company's worth of Dauntless Vanguard on the battlefield, only fifteen were currently present with Jarvan, the others having been assigned to the other generals or leading from key locations in the battle force. Nonetheless, Jarvan was certain fifteen would be able to overcome any odds.

"Break their ranks!" Garen shouted as he began to blade spin towards the enemy. Jarvan, not about to be outdone by his best friend and captain of the guard, dashed forwards with a cry of "Demacia!"

The first mech swung its red blade around in an attempt to intercept the prince, but Jarvan slid under its unwieldy blade and shoved his silver lance right up into its abdomen. The mech sparked briefly before trying to bring its blade around, but Jarvan quickly stood up and ripped the blade upwards in the same motion. It popped the crested head off the thing, ending its pitiful existence.

The second of the large melee mechs died in the same time frame, with Garen's spinning blade cutting right through it in a shower of shrapnel and sparks.

The pair exchanged the briefest of smiles just as the rest of the elite bodyguard charged into combat.

At some unheard command the smaller rangers made room for their larger cousins, letting the melee proficient mechs duel the bodyguard as they attacked the easier spearmen.

They underestimated the effect of two commanders charging into battle would have on the spearmen however. With their morale boosted by the seemingly reckless display of skill, the spearmen tried to emulate their mighty leaders and fought three times as hard as they had before. The rangers soon found themselves being outmatched in close quarters combat, and needed to fall back where they could bring their deadly firearms to bear.

The melee automatons were having significantly less trouble than the rangers. While the Vanguard warriors were swifter and more proficient with their weapons, the enemy was more numerous and more heavily armoured. Really, the only thing that made a difference in the fighting was the presence of Jarvan and Garen. They were unmatched by the mechanical creatures, and each of their thrusts and swings took another one down. After the better part of ten minutes, the enemy was routed from the plaza, leaving countless dead in their wake.

The Demacians there had been decimated, too. Half of the original number of soldiers had survived, and a quarter of the guards were dead. Jaravan wasn't sure if victory was possible if these kinds of losses were happening all over the rest of the battlefield.

"My prince," Garen said. Not even a hint of exhaustion was present in his voice.

Jarvan turned to face him, a wild smirk on his face. He had enjoyed the fighting, unlike his stoic companion.

"We should fall back and regroup," the captain stated as he looked around at the fallen.

"Nonsense," Jarvan said, twirling his spear around.

There was a moment of indecision on Garen's face as he pondered whether to question his prince or not. The moment passed, and he spoke. "It is the tactically sound decision to regroup and make a united push, lest we be caught out of position without any support at all."

"It's the tactically sound decision," Jarvan interrupted, "but is it eh tactically wise decision?"

Garen hesitated.

"Squads from the _Sunderers _battalion would have had to retreat over there," Jarvan gestured with his spear over a collection of large buildings, "And would have been unable to make it back, since they would have had to pass through here." Jarvan paused to take a look around. "They aren't here. Now, since the battalion in question was one of the largest, I doubt it has been totally annihilatedâ€¦ but it would be if we fell back."

Garen nodded, reluctantly. "I understand, lord, however, it is risky and may very well cost you your life. Reinforcements will not be able to easily get there should you find yourself in trouble-"

"Which is why I have a plan," Jarvan IV interrupted for the second time. "The Calvary has yet to be committed to the battle, and it would be entirely possible for them to right up the easter road and charge right in â€" I think."

"â€| You think?"

"Probably."

"That is less than reassuring," Garen stated. The soldiers around the pair slowly began to reform into ranks.

"Whatever. I will take these men and advance, and you shall call the calvary."

"Wait, what?" Garen looked like he was going to have a heart attack. "I cannot be separated from your side, lest you become â€" "

"Not to worry," Jarvan said as he interrupted for the third time. "The Seneschal is leading the eastern flank cavalry, and he will be more than capable of taking over for you. And, might I add, I am not defenseless."

"It's not your skill I am worried about," Garen muttered under his breath. He then took in a huge gulp of air and said, "Very well, I shall do as ordered, my prince." With that, he turned and talked off.

Really, he should have known better than to argue with a prince.

* * *

><p>The first of the melee mechs slashed downward, attempting to catch Jarvan off guard as he dealt with the second of the pair. Jarvan was not so easily caught off guard, and successfully parried the blow while staying out of range of the second.<p>

The first lunged in again, and Jarvan quickly turned away and executed a front roll, coming up just in front of a wooden wall which may or may not be part of a blacksmiths shop. He couldn't really tell.

The second mech began lumbering towards him while the first just stood there, perhaps making sure the prince didn't try to run away again. Jarvan quickly solved that issue by tossing his Demacian standard up into the air and watching it crunch home in the mechs crested face.

"Headshot!" Jarvan said to himself, pumping his fist in joy.

The second mech didn't seem as pleased by his achievement.

Jarvan quickly moved his spear into a guard position, waiting for the mech to make the first move. It did by cleaving its red blade downwards, forcing Jarvan to parry up high. At the last second the mech changed the direction of the blade and spun it around, trying to hit Jarvan in the side. The prince responded by activating his aegis, and the blade bounced off harmlessly. It only took Jarvan a further three seconds to disable his foe.

Jarvan huffed slightly. The battle around him had been raging for a while now, with no sign of stopping.

True to his prediction, when he had pushed on he had found several squads from the _Sunderers _battalion. They had continued onwards, and had found this large open plaza " or at least, that was what it was now. It seemed to have originally been several plazas separated by buildings, but Demacian siege weapons seemed to have destroyed all of those. By the time they had pushed into this area, he had about of company of men with him. The original plan had been to stop here and set up a forward base, but the enemy wasn't about to let the Demacian invaders off so easily. They had arrived in force, and were causing some serious carnage.

Jarvan looked up as he heard the sound of feet against wood. A moment later, and archer appeared on the roof above him.

'Sir! No sign of reinforcements yet, Sir!" he shouted, half breathless, half excited.

Jarvan nodded his head. Truth be told, reinforcements were overdue at this point" but that couldn't be helped. Nothing went as planned in war, and he would have to make do with what he had.

Another bright beam of light pierced through the haze that covered the battlefield. Jarvan knew it was probably a sniper automaton, but he couldn't help but be worried at the prospect of enemy magicians. That was something he definitely was not prepared to deal with.

He heard a noise. It sounded like something pounding across against cobblestone, the sound of something striking stone"

He thrust out his lance, the magic binding it together with the banner drawing it forwards, launching Jarvan to it at the very moment the wall exploded outwards.

In the center of the ruined wall were three of the melee mechs and more than a dozen smaller ones, all of them rushing forwards.

Jarvan grimaced. _This can't be good, _he thought.

"Pull back!" he shouted as loudly as he could. "Pull back in defensive formation!"

His words seemed to reach some troops, and soon enough all the Demacians began to fall back in good order and reformed as they did so. Some soldiers were unable to do so, however, and they were quickly surrounded and executed by the robots.

Jarvan stared at the charging troops. "Vanguard, to me!" he shouted again, and the elite bodyguard rushed by his side.

The mechs impacted less than a second later, using their momentum to push the elite troops back several steps, but ultimately their momentum was halted. It then became a game of hack and slash, with the Dauntless Vanguard and their prince having the advantage.

One of the larger ones lunged forwards, and the prince sidestepped the blow before crunching his spear home in its chest cavity. He then

kicked it away as it exploded, slaying three rangers.

Jarvan had learned from personal experience (as his soot-blackened armour would attest) that the larger mechs exploded when stabbed in just the right place. He had told all of his Vanguard that friendly tip, and all of them had put the information to good use, as was evident now. All of the large ones were slain, leaving only the little ones in their place, and they did not last much longer.

Even so, two more Vanguard members were lost, which was a serious blow to Jarvan's limited forces.

"Sir! The enemy is pushing up, Sir!"

Jarvan wasn't sure who had shouted the information, but right now that was irrelevant. The enemy had just crossed the rubble strewn area in the center of the battlefield, and were pouring energy fire into the assembled ranks of soldiers.

"Shields up!" Jarvan shouted, but it was unnecessary. Most of the swordsmen had already brought their shields up, and the energy weapons were slowly but surely eating into them.

Jarvan dashed towards the battle line, hoping he could perhaps drive them back long enough for the Demacians to get in a better position.

He stopped when he heard the ground shake. He looked to the east, and saw dust rising.

"Men! Brace!" he shouted.

The mechs didn't seem to notice anything, or they didn't care. Either way, the first several ranks were utterly crushed when the Demacian cavalry smashed into them.

Jarvan smiled as the cavalry pushed further into the enemy horde. With a cry of "Demacia!" he threw his standard into the disordered enemy and dashed towards it, knocking several of them up into the air.

Of course, the standard had another benefit other than allowing Jarvan to jump towards it. Its magic was a blessing to all nearby Demacians; when they saw it, they were filled with faith and strength. The empowered swordsmen and Vanguard dived in after their liege, laying waste to the enemy around them.

Jarvan looked around the battlefield as he ducked under the blow of a ranger, trying to spot the seneschal.

There. He could see Xin Zhao riding a warhorse, plowing deeper into the enemy with every step.

Then Jarvan saw the melee mech rise up behind the warhorse, and swing the blade. It sheared right through Xin's mount, tossing him to the broken pavement.

With a growl, Jarvan sliced through two rangers with one sweep of his spear and tried to run towards Xin.

* * *

><p>Xin got up unsteadily, clutching his spear in both hands. Four rangers ran at him, and he quickly went on the offensive. As fast as lighting, his first two strikes disabled two mechs and the third knocked one up into the air before it landed back down on his spear, ending its existence. The fourth backed off; firing its weapon, but Xin tossed the impaled mech at it and sent it tumbling away in a mess of mechanical limbs.<p>

He then turned to the large one that had slaughtered his horse, and raised his spear in challenge. While he wasn't sure if the mech could understand him, it was his honour to try.

The mech spun its blade around, the red sword catching the light. Several rangers gathered around it at an unheard command.

Xin launched himself towards it, the impact of his spear against its armour causing a severe dent. He then twirled his spear around with great force, knocking all the nearby automatons around away.

The mech responded with a harsh uppercut, but Xin merely sidestepped it and cut the offending hand off.

The mech brought the stump back, sparks spitting from the severed end. It punched with its remaining hand before that, too, was gone. Several seconds later it was also without a head.

Xin turned, looking around to get his bearings, and spotted the prince mere steps away from him, dispatching a flamethrower wielding enemy. He nodded to the prince, and made his way to his side.

* * *

><p>Jarvan nodded back in return, before turning his attention back to the wider battle. The cavalry had pushed in hard, and there was an opening that could be exploited by the more nimble swordsmen. It might be enough to â€" <p>

There.

Jarvan and Xin spotted it both at the same time; one of the augmented humans present at the attack on the institute. It was surrounded by four of the large automatons, and it appeared to be giving orders to the mech army in the area.

The pair, prince and seneschal, charged together with a frightening pace. Any ranger that got in their way was cut down, leaving only the commander in their path.

The four mech bodyguards moved forwards in an intercept course. Xin responded by dashing forwards to the closest one, the force of his charge slowing the entire group down.

That was the opening Jarvan needed.

He cried out "Demacia!" louder than he had before, and jumped high into the air before descending down onto the commander. The impact shattered the ground, sending chunks of stone larger than a man was tall around the prince and his foe, sealing them off from the

bodyguards.

The augmented human roared and punched, catching Jarvan in the chest. The blow dented his armour and knocked the breath out of him, allowing the enemy to land two further punches on his body.

He was able to bring up his shield in time to block the fourth hit, and the enemy was sufficiently slowed by the magical displacement to allow Jarvan to hit him twice in return, but his enemies' armour held.

The commander jumped back and brought a pistol to bear, firing it thrice in quick succession. Jarvan allowed his Aegis to block the shots, and dived in again. The commander saw it coming and dashed to the side, hitting Jarvan with two shots. One drew blood.

The prince ducked low and tossed his standard up, but the enemy dived forwards and dodged the descending flag. It leveled its pistol with the crouching prince's head.

Jarvan smiled and thrust his spear towards the standard, getting magically pulled towards its location. The commander fired the rest of his magazine hastily, each shot missing, before being knocked up into the air by Jarvan's dash.

The commander didn't even get to touch the ground again before he was slain. His head was taken off before he could do so.

The large rock walls collapsed, revealing Xin standing in the middle of a pile of scrap metal and red swords. Jarvan gave him a thumbs up as he covered his red stained side.

There was another thumping noise, similar to that of the cavalry from before. On top of that was a high pitched whine, which together could herald nothing good.

Jarvan looked around, trying to find the source of the noise so he could reposition his troops accordingly.

A building ahead collapsed, revealing one of the stalker tanks that had attacked Demacia just a day before. It pounded forwards on its bastion-like legs, each one causing the ground to shake.

The seneschal looked to Jarvan, who in turn shouted, "All units! Scatter into cover immediately!"

The mech stopped moving and it shifted its plates around, green energy gathering around the barrel. The whining noise became deafeningly loud.

"..We should run," Xin offered.

Jarvan nodded.

The whining reached a crescendo.

The sound of air splitting sounded across the battlefield, nearly overpowering. Jarvan heard the explosion, felt the ping of shrapnel and rock, smelled burning wood, his skin tingling at the proximity of the energy discharge.

The one thing that was lacking however was the pain.

The smoke cleared suddenly, but it wasn't from the wind.

A pelican dropship hovered over the battlefield, the downdraft from its engines blowing the smoke away. Two of its missile pods were empty, and the stalker tank that had been on the verge of firing not a moment before was gone in a smoking crater.

"â€|Okay, that was kind of cool," Xin Zhao admitted.

* * *

><p>The Master Chief was huddled in the corner of a building, avoiding the incoming fire from the sniper mech, which he had dubbed 'Jackal' for its eerie resemblance toâ€| well, jackals.<p>

The bright beam of light passed by his hiding spot, and as soon as it did so he turned out of cover and fired two shots from his DMR: both hit it in the forehead, dropping it down dead.

The Chief was currently leading a force of roughly one hundred Demacian swordsmen, headed towards the Nexus' located at the heart of the crystal scar. The same action was being repeated by Garen, Jarvan, and Xin Zhao on other flanks.

The Chief had rushed back to Kalamanda after finishing up in the Freljord, and had found the assault already in progress. He had used the heavy armaments of the Pelican to clear streets and the entire plaza where Jarvan was fighting, effectively securing a forward base and supply lines for the invading Demacian force. It was also where he had landed the Pelican, since it had been pretty much running on fumes by that point. Soon after Garen and a red-clad general had arrived with more forces, inquiring as to what they should do then. At the Chief's direction, they had decided to advance on four separate fronts while the general stayed behind and coordinated the efforts of the other generals. The main goal would be the crystal scar, where the Chief assumed the enemies' overall leader would be located.

"Third squad, advance on me. Graves, stay on my left. Riven, Yasuo and Thresh â€" stay behind," Chief ordered, receiving affirmatives from everyone.

The entire plan involved moving through the dense, residential area around the mining section of the city. While it wasn't a whole lot of ground to cover, it was easy to get caught in crossfires or be easily overwhelmed by the implacable foe. It had been the Chief's idea to have squads hop from building to building while a couple of squads moved along the streets to attract attention and draw the enemy out, leaving the mechs vulnerable to flank attacks and crossfire from the few remaining archers.

Of course, Chief would only lead from the front, so he was part of the 'bait' teams. Not that it was a problem for him, but he wasn't so sure about his team. He hoped they would be smart enough not to take any risks.

"Contact!" yelled one of the soldiers' voices. "Left street!"

The Chief pointed to three swordsmen in his group. "Redeploy."

They obeyed. While they weren't nearly as well drilled as UNSC marines, they were eager, and that counted for a lot.

It would see them killed, though, if they could not keep it under wraps.

Two mechs rounded a corner, one of the blade-wielding 'zealot' type mechs leading them.

"Defensive positions," the Chief said to the squad, and they promptly locked into formation with their shields up. Chief nodded to Graves, and they began shooting at the same time. Their speed enabled them to cut down one of the rangers, and the other one only managed two seconds of sustained fire before finding itself in three pieces. The zealot was harder to put down, and it made it halfway to them before it, too, fell.

Nobody moved as the Chief and Graves reloaded their weapons.

"Umâ€¦ Should we continue?" the squad champion, Evans, inquired.

"No," the Chief said, before hastily adding, "hold position."

The seconds trickled by.

"Sir, I don't thinkâ€¦"

A group of mechs rounded the corner, one of the augmented humans leading them this time. There was roughly a dozen of them, and they were all charging fast.

"Third squad!" the Chief called out as he fell back. "Flanking positions, on my mark!"

Graves sent out a wave of buckshot before running backwards into the safety of the defensive line. The Chief stayed out in the open, firing his DMR at the augmented man, but the bullets seemed to be having no effect.

Five meters away.

"Smoke," Chief said calmly as he drew his blade.

Graves launched a smoke grenade, detonating it not three meters away from the line.

"Mark!"

All hell broke loose in the next second as the third squad, the ones in the leftmost building, charged out into the street. The enemy was going too fast to receive the charge, and ran straight into the swords of the bait squad at the same time third squad layed into them with their own blades.

The Chief waded in, going towards the augmented human who was crushing a silver-armoured warrior in his hands.

It took one swung for the Chief to separate the creature's head from its shoulders, allowing the soldier to fall free.

"T-thank you, sir," he coughed out.

"Don't worry about it," came the reply.

Within minutes the entire enemy force was eliminated, and then the Chief had the squad begin to move again.

If his theory was right, and it usually was, the enemy was close to its breaking point. That would be the only reason the enemy was charging out of cover with their field commanders â€" they needed their best warriors on the battlefield immediately. It also reinforced the Chief's theory that their overall commander was in the crystal scar; after all, there wouldn't be a need to charge out if this wasn't the case. And there was no point of it to be a bluff, since the crystal scar was hardly the place for an ambush.

They moved forwards, eliminating enemy squads as they appeared. Each time the enemy attacked they used a different tactic, as if they were learning from the Demacians but were trying to use tactics from a pre-selected list. They lacked ingenuity and, while effective, were quickly countered by the Chief.

It was bizarre, but that was hardly the weirdest thing that had happened to the Chief recently.

"Spartan?" Jarvan's voice reverberated within the Chief's helm.

The Chief had given all the Demacian leaders something with which they could keep in contact, the same system the Summoners had given him back at the raid on the institute. It was fairly useful, if unreliable.

"Sir?"

"We've made contact with General Duraan's forces and High Councilor Kolminye. They are coming in from the north, and should arrive soon," the prince said.

"Understood, sir. Keep their lanes open, we'll distract them from here."

"Great. Umâ€¦ over and out?"

The line went dead.

"Okay, I want everyone to disperse," the Chief shouted, turning to the 'bait' team. The other squads were sure to hear him, as well. "On the other side of these buildings are the mining huts of the Scar plains, just a short ways away from the actual Crystal Scar. It will be open ground, so stay low and avoid any incoming fire that will be sure to be there. _Tiamat_ company will be there too, so we will have the numbers to sweep away the foe. Understood?"

He received nods of confirmation. Good.

He turned and began to walk as the soldiers began splitting up.

"You should have made a kickass speech, there," Yasuo said, coming up beside the Chief.

"I'm not good at those," Chief replied.

"Could have gotten their morale up," Riven said, coming up on the Chief's other side.

"Yeah, listen to the Noxian. Just threaten to kill them if they retreat like they do in Noxus, and we'll all be fine."

"â€|Seriously? Again with this shi-"

"Stop, both of you," Chief ordered. He moved away from them, bracing himself against the side of a wooden building that had a large window that looked out onto the plains. He peered through.

Nothing. It was empty, except for the large mining holes in the ground and several scattered longhomes.

"That's a trap," Thresh offered.

"If so, we meet it head on," Chief said. "All troops! Charge!"

The cheer of the charging troops was nearly deafening.

"You didn't want to surprise the enemy, did you?" Graves asked sarcastically.

The Chief did not answer, instead opting to rip a hole through the building and charging forwards also.

Three meters. DMR up. No contact.

Five meters. Pan left. No contact. Pan right. No contact.

Ten meters. Motion sensor check: clear.

Fifteen meters. On third of the way to the Crystal Scar proper. No contact.

Twenty five meters. Cheering dies off as the soldier's lose momentum. No enemy in sight.

Thirty meters. Silence. Soldiers moving at a brisk pace now. DMR still raised.

Thirty three meters. Motion sensor ping.

The ground abruptly exploded. Most of the soldiers were out of the explosion radius.

But they were not out of the radius of the plasma beam that lanced through the smoke, annihilating a squad in an eyeblink.

"Whatâ€| theâ€| hell?" Yasuo muttered, dumbstruck.

One massive leg raised itself from the hole, smashing into the ground

with resounding force. Then another, and another, and another. Finally, the thing's body rose into view, revealing something that, for all the world resembled a black Scarab super-heavy infantry platform.

It stood just above the hole, leaving the legs keeping It up as the only vulnerable and targetable points.

It rotated its head to face the Chief.

"Blue team?" he said. He thought he could feel his voice tremble, but that was impossible. Probable just the aftershocks of the scarabs ascent. "Riven is now in charge. She will be leading the assault on the crystal scar. Hurry."

"What?!" Thresh said, practically shouting something which had not yet done before. "We are not scattering. We take this foe together."

"Yeah, what the ghost said. Plus, why is the murdering Noxian in charge?"

"Because she is the only one among you with the military rank of Captain. Secondly, if you stay, you will be reduced to stains on the ground." He put his DMR on his back. "Go. I have this."

"Do you want us to wait for you?" Riven asked.

"What? You're giving in THAT easily?" Yasuo shouted. He looked angry, but the Chief couldn't tell. Could just be exhaustion colouring his face red.

"It's an order from our direct superior, and I trust him fully. If he says he has this, he has this."

"Go on ahead," the Chief said. "The Demacians will look to you to lead the charge, and secure a beachhead. I might be here a while."

He pointed to the hole in the ground. "The Scara-the vehicle was buried under ground, but the mines are further off. Something this potent should have been in the outer city were it could bring use its firepower to its fullest, but it's here. Its guarding something." He hesitated for a second, wondering whether he should colour his statement with personal opinion, before adding, "and it looks like it wants a duel."

The creatures beam cannon began to charge up.

None of blue team said anything, until Graves began pushing everyone along. "Okay, good luck n' all that, but I don't wanna be soot in th' mornin'."

They began to run.

The Chief reached back and grabbed the secondary weapon he had brought along with him for the battle.

Funny, he thought, _I didn't think I would be using this today._

The M41 Surface-to-Surface Rocket Medium Anti-Vehicle/Assault Weapon made a satisfying _thunk_ as it braced against the Chief's shoulder.

"Okay," the Chief said to himself as he sighted along the rocket's inbuilt sights. "Time to make some noise."

The Spartan and the Scarab fired at the same time.

* * *

><p>*Cough* Sorry for the long update time, but it's kinda hard to write - or concentrate - when ur on a cruise and sick. Sorry.

So.. yeah. This chapter is a lot longer than anything else I've written. Like, twice as long. Hope you guys enjoy this one, hopefully it doesn't feel to rushed, because I felt like it was.

As always, review if you can because it'll help me out with future chapters. Enjoy?

Oh yeah, looks like I'm getting nerfed. RIP novatyrant, won't even be picked again 'till played in LCS.

35. Chapter 35

Chapter 35: Next stop: certain death

Battle for Kalamanda, part 2

They both fired at the same time, the massive beam of the scarab ripping through solid ground and leaving a smoking furrow behind while the rocket flew true and smashed into the rocky outcropping just inside the scarab's emergence hole.

The Master Chief had managed to dodge the beam as soon as the rocket had cleared the launcher, but the proximity to the energy sent static running along his shields and left a taste of ozone in his mouth.

He used the brief cloud of smoke and dust to fire another quick shot at the rocky outcropping, the two combined rockets causing large cracks to appear.

The Scarab began to turn, the head starting to glow again. The Chief knew he had time before it could fire, however, so he reloaded his launcher quickly "no more ammo left" and began to run around the hole caused by the super-heavy.

The Scarab continued turning, and the side gunners began to fire their plasma turrets. The Chief ran past them, waiting for the opportunity to fire.

There; the perfect angle. He stopped and took aim. The plasma fire from the closest turret impacted against his shields, draining them frighteningly quickly, but not fast enough to stop the Chief from firing two shots in quick succession, both of them impacting against their designated target.

He discarded the now useless rocket launcher and resumed running, outpacing the wild shots from the side turrets.

The Chief continued to run circles around the scarab, forcing it to turn to get the Spartan within sight of its main cannon.

However, the Chief knew he could not outrun it forever. It may not be as skilled or powerful as a Covenant Scarab but it was still strong, and the beam would kill him instantly if it hit him. His only hope was that it would turn just enough to â€

The beam impacted the ground just behind the Chief, sending up more burning ground and breaking the Chief's remaining shields. It scorched the Chief's armour to near critical levels and made his skin unbearably hot. Several warning chimes in his helmet began to whine, signaling the degradation of the gel layer, the collapse of his shields, and the popping of several armour seals.

That could prove to be problematic.

He continued running, though, and the scarab was forced to follow while its beam still fired.

It stepped again, its leg crunching home in the rocky outcropping.

Cracks sprung up suddenly, widening from the now unbearable weight of the Scarab.

There was a loud crack as the rocky outcropping collapsed, taking the Scarab's leg with it. It fell into the hole it had emerged from, its laser firing high into the sky.

The Scarab fell half way into the hole before it halted itself, its remaining legs digging into the sides of the hole.

But the Chief wasn't about to allow the vehicle to get back up. He jumped feet first into the hole, and landed atop the Scarab's back.

* * *

><p>There was an explosion; all of blue team heard it. They all looked back in near unison, and saw the massive plume of smoke rise up like a snake rearing its head.<p>

Naturally, it was Yasuo who said the obvious. "Wasn't thatâ€| wasn't that where the Chief was fighting?"

The rest of the team exchanged looks with each other.

"That wasn't him, was it?" Yasuo asked again.

"Move on, team," Riven said, waving forwards with her sword.

Thresh was the only other being to move. Graves and Yasuo both looked back, hesitating.

Thresh looked back at the pair. "I'll be sure to collect some souls

for you two. I'm generous like that."

Graves rolled his eyes, grinned around his cigar, and moved forwards with sure steps. Yasuo still looked hesitant, his eyes searching the smoke plume, before he finally turned away.

"Chief? Master Chief?"

Riven was the one to respond to Jarvan's plea. "The Master Chief isn't here at the momentâ€|Sir."

"Then where the hell is he?"

"He's, ah, busy at the moment," she said unconvincingly

"â€|Well, make him not busy. We're in some serious trouble, here. The enemy is countering every tactic I come up with, and they are hitting us really hard. This'll be a pyrrhic victory at best if it continues like this."

"Blue team is entering the battlefield now, sir," Riven stated. "We will help push towards the Scar."

There was an explosion over the mic and the line went dead, but not before Riven heard the prince shout out, "What the hell is blue team?!"

"â€|That doesn't sound so good," Graves muttered, firing on a slender jackal mech that had appeared.

"No, It does not," Riven agreed. "Let's hurry. The faster we win this, the faster we can go look for the Chief."

That spurred them all on. They rushed forwards, crushing mechs as they appeared, moving to join up with the battalion of soldiers that had run on ahead when the massive mech had attacked. Not that they were a battalion anymore, since the mech had annihilated a good quarter of them.

They caught up with them quickly, since the few enemies that had been guarding here had been destroyed in the rushing advance.

The Demacian center line â€" such as it was in an urban combat environment â€" was clearly buckling. There were several holes in the line, with rangers and Demacians fighting behind the lines while the zealots fought in front.

"Alrightâ€| Umâ€|" Riven shuffled from foot to foot.

"Riven?" Thresh inquired. "Cap'n? Your orders?"

Riven looked a little bit indecisive.

"Orders? Since when have we needed orders?" Yasuo scoffed just before he charged straight in, his katana held low.

"â€|Yeah, he's a moron," Graves stated while lighting a new cigar.

"Geez," Riven sighed. "Alright, let's all just follow up on Yasuo. We

can try and relieve our front lines, maybe get them to focus on us so the others can regroup."

The three of them moved forwards in near-unison, each of them picking their targets and eliminating them.

Graves stood in line with the Demacian soldiers, his brown gear somewhat out of place in the line of silver and blue. His shotgun proved to be extremely useful, taking down rangers at a distance and giving the Demacian soldiers some respite.

Thresh stayed just ahead of the soldiers, using his shield and his spectral form to turn away mortal blows and guard the weaker, fleshier mortals behind him. He attack sparingly, waiting for his scythe to wind up to full power before he unleashed it. Each blow, however, claimed the life of another automaton.

That only left Riven, who naturally charged into the fiercest of the fighting, which landed her smack dab beside Yasuo. The samurai was hacking away at one of the large zealot-pattern mechs, but every blow of his sword was countered by the flashing red blade. Several rangers moved to surround Yasuo, gathering in a semi-circle around him and looking as if they were going to fire upon him.

They probably did not care about the survival of the zealot, or were confident in it's armour.

Riven threw herself right in, targeting the rangers first. She used a technique she personally dubbed 'broken wings' to dash towards them, scything her blade out with each flip and cutting down multiple enemies at a time. After three repetitions of the skill the semi-circle of enemies was obliterated, leaving only the zealot-pattern in the middle.

"Yasuo, fall back," Riven said, moving in to intercept the mech. "I'll take care of this."

"Nah, I've got this, Noxian!"

The zealot swung its blade around and smashed Yasuo's aside, sending it flying deeper into the fight. It then hit Yasuo in the side with it's armoured fist, sending him also flying.

Riven stared blankly for a few seconds before shaking her confusion off. She swung her blade into a guard position, allowing the large mech to make the first move.

It swung down, and Riven dodged to one side while simultaneously activating her Ki burst, stunning the zealot. She lunged towards it with her blade extended, and was rewarded with a crunching noise as her blade punched through its armour.

A little belatedly she jumped back, and then the zealot exploded. Black specks latched themselves onto the front of her robe, making her look like she had just walked through a fire. Not all that far from the truth, really.

She looked around quickly, taking in all the aspects of the battle with the trained eye of a captain.

The right flank stretched out of the small town " or random cluster of buildings, whatever this was considered as " and didn't seem to be in danger of breaking or achieving anything anytime soon. The center was the strongest, with the Demacian swordsmen still in step and with their shields locked. The left flank, or whatever passed for a left flank, had totally collapsed, devolving into a series of individual battles.

And there was Yasuo. He had been tossed out into the midst of the left flank, and was trying to engage a pair of rangers in hand-to-hand combat so he could recover his katana.

Well, at least he was on the weakest side. Perfect place to start this fight, if nothing else.

"Graves, Thresh, keep the center line strong," Riven shouted out as she impaled another mech on her broken sword. She did not wait for a response, not that she expected to hear one. Blue team was not exactly competent, especially without the Chief here.

She charged in after the samurai for the second time, slicing at the rangers within reach and trying her hardest to free up Demacian soldiers along the way.

"Damn it! Why the hell does your armour have to be so hard?" Yasuo cried out, cradling his hand. The ranger he had tried to punch didn't even fazed. It pulled its own arm back, ready to deliver a punishing stab.

Riven body tackled the robot down and caved its head in with her heavy obsidian blade before rising back up to her feet and slaying the other one.

"Eh. Thanks." Yasuo said quietly.

"Stop being an idiot," Riven said. "And pick up your katana already."

Yasuo hurried to obey. Riven began to shout out commands, trying to reform the scattered Demacian troops. Few obeyed, as most of them were too tied down to actually attempt anything.

Riven hesitantly looked around, the small group of soldiers having gathered around her. The dust was rising thicker than before, obscuring her vision beyond a half dozen meters.

"Yasuo, do you think you can " "

"I got this," Yasuo said, cracking his knuckles. He flourished his katana and waved it around, the dust slowly following the motion of the blade.

"Yasuo, you're making this worse, not better," Riven stated.

"I got this," he repeated. With one final flourish of his sword the dust exploded outwards with force, knocking back several automatons. Riven said nothing, but the soldiers beside her looked fairly impressed.

"Try and clear up the outlying rangers," Riven ordered the Ronin. She

had the Demacians around her get into a defensive formation spears and swords bristling outwards.

Yasuo did not budge from his spot.

"Yasuo, stop wasting time," Riven said.

"Geez, don't make it sound so dramatic," he complained. He gave a roguish grin and dashed forwards to the nearest ranger, cutting it down with practiced precision before moving on to the next one.

Riven moved forwards, her vanguard of soldiers moving along with her. Several rangers moved to intercept them, but it was easy for the Demacians to cut them down with well placed blows.

Just ahead, Yasuo impaled a jackal-pattern automaton with his sword before hurling the body off into a nearby pair of rangers.

One of the larger zealots gathered a squad of over a dozen rangers around it and charged towards the exile, in an attempt to overpower them.

"Brace!" was Riven's shouted command, and she gripped her heavy blade with both hands as the enemy rushed towards their position.

The enemy, while outnumbering the few soldiers Riven had with her, was not able to pierce the defensive ring the soldiers had set up. Their plasma weaponry cut glowing lines in shields and armour, but the Demacians were resolute and did not give ground.

The larger mech, naturally, attacked Riven. It sent it's blade flying downwards, and Riven was forced to block since her position in the defensive line did not give her space to maneuver. The enemy attacked again, the impact pushing her back, and then it attacked again.

Riven weathered the furious blows, allowing the mech to attack unchallenged.

Another hit.

Another.

Another.

"Demacians!" Riven shouted, hoping her voice would carry further than this isolated battle. "Push!"

The soldiers in her immediate vicinity pushed forwards against their enemy, using their shields to bludgeon and make room for the advance. Riven, too, advance forwards, activating her runic shield and shoulder-charging the zealot.

It tried to land a blow on her before she could knock it over, but the sword merely sent ripples across her rune shield. She hit the mech as its sword bounced off, and it toppled over like a fallen tree. From this new position she was able to use her much shorter and broader blade to hack at the zealot's center mass repeatedly while it struggled to bring its weapon to bear.

It took five hits for her to finally end its movements. She got back up, quickly dusted herself off, and shouted more commands to the Demacian soldiers.

It appeared, at first glance, that the Demacians had managed to push out the enemy. The left flank was slowly reforming, the soldiers having won their individual battles and fighting as part of units again. Not the best position, but infinitely better than it had been before.

"Uh, Riven?" Yasuo dashed beside her, looking slightly out of breath.

Riven tilted her head.

"We might have a bit of a problem," Yasuo said, summoning a wall of wind to deflect numerous incoming shots. "The soulless bastards seem to have gotten tired of playing."

"That's not very specific," Riven pointed out.

There was a crashing noise, and a small cluster of huts collapsed as stalker tank and two squads of rangers made their appearance known.

"Ah," Riven said. "Now I get it."

* * *

><p>The Chief coughed, trying to clear his lungs of dust as he simultaneously deflected the red blade descending for his head.<p>

The blade bounced, failing to penetrate the Mjolnir, and the Chief spun away for a brief moment of respite. He coughed several times, trying to clear the last of the dust from his lungs. While his helmet's air scrubbers were supposed to filter all substances out, his armour was not exactly in tip-top condition.

The zealot, several paces away, gripped it's sword in both hands and levelled it with the Chief. In response, the Spartan drew his magnum and emptied half a clip into its center mass. It stumbled back, smoke pouring off of it, before it exploded. The last two zealots were caught in the explosion, reducing them to smoking piles of scrap metal.

The Chief used the brief respite to breathe deep and clear his lungs. The Scarab had exploded much more forcefully than the Chief had expected, and he had been caught directly in the blast of oily smoke.

He looked around the cavern. Large crystals dotted the walls, most of them surrounded by scaffolding. Only one tunnel led out of the area, and so that was where the Chief headed. He kept his magnum raised, knowing his DMR would suffer in the tight confines of the mine.

Nothing. He traveled along the tunnel for a full five minutes, and found nothing. Other than the half dozen zealots and the scarab, this

place seemed to be deserted.

_Maybe I was wrong, _he mused to himself as he reached a dead end.

Except it wasn't a dead end. Rather, it appeared to be a sealed door that was rather hastily attached to the tunnel wall. The Chief looked along both ends, trying to find some sort of control panel that he could hack into, but there was nothing. More likely than not it activated from some code sent between the mechs and whatever was on the other side of the door.

No matter. There were other ways to open a door, after all. He placed his hand on the center of the metal door, testing its strength. He drew his fist back and punched it: Once, twice, and on the third hit the door dented inwards.

The Chief drew back after he heard the very faint sound of an alarm on the other side of the door. He would need to ramp things up a bit, and fast.

He moved back before shoulder charging the door, and it this time it only took one hit for it to collapse completely.

He was on his feet in an instant, but even so the enemy was already ready to kill. The Chief snatched up a piece of broken metal the size of his arm and used it to block the red sword that descended for his head.

He jumped to the side and brought the metal bar crashing into the mech. It did nothing but slightly dent it's armour and bounce off.

The Zealot glared at the Chief.

The Chief raised his magnum and put five shots, the rest of his clip, right into the thing's face. He turned on his axis, reloading as he did so, and punched an oncoming ranger right through the chest before throwing it away. He moved forwards, gunning down the other three rangers in the room.

He paused, reloading his weapon again. He looked around the room, making sure it was truly as empty as his motion sensor said it was.

The room itself was covered in more scaffolding than the cavern had been, with large crates and metal plating covering several areas. Numerous doors led off to other areas, and one large door was open on the other end of the cavern, an eerie blue light seeping through. The Chief began walking towards it, figuring it would be the best area to start his search for the enemy leader.

His motion sensor pinged as three new contacts appeared. The Chief turned to the left and looked up, seeing three jackal-pattern mechs run across the catwalk. They stopped and fired at the Chief, and two of the three shots hit. While their weapons were not nearly as powerful as a covenant beam rifle, two shots were enough to lower his shields down to half.

The Chief quickly holstered his magnum and drew out his DMR, using

quick, precise shots to take down the jackals.

The Chief was starting to think the enemy commander was just throwing mechs at him, trying vainly to stop him. He found that rather odd, as he was used to commanders that pulled elaborate tactics in order to kill or capture him.

He neared the open door, using the wall beside it as cover. His motion sensor pinged once, revealing a large dot just past the entrance, surrounded by several smaller dots.

The only problem was the fact that the big dot wasn't staying red. It was flashing between red and yellow. Somehow, it was registering as a hostile and friendly contact. That shouldn't be happening.

But he could not worry about that now. He didn't have the time.

His first glimpse of the room beyond was through the scope of his marksman's rifle. The light was not exactly strong, but it was a little bit disconcerting, and it bathed the whole room. The room itself was almost covered in polished, pearly metal, with large crystals dotting the area. The crystals were refined, polished, quite unlike the ones that had been in the entrance cavern.

Nearer to the door were half a dozen ranger-pattern mechs in formation, aiming at the that wasn't what caught his attention, not at all.

In the center of the room was a large object, something like a crystal ball or eye. It was covered in thick, shifting metal plates much like that of the stalker tank. The thing pulsed energy of an alarming frequency, and the Chief's shields were disturbed from this distance. It was powerful, he could tell. But was it their commander? And what exactly was it?

The rangers opened fire on the Chief, a wave of rippling plasma flying towards him.

* * *

><p>Another one, impaled on his spear. Another one, crushed beneath his heel. Another one, ripped clean through by his fist.

They had been changing up tactics far too fast for Jarvan's liking. At first, they had simply fought like they the Demacians would, isolating forces and taking them apart piecemeal. Then they had changed to ranged suppression fire, then they had changed to mixed tactics, and now they were going all out on the Demacians, as if they didn't care about their losses and needed to win as fast as possible.

But maybe they didn't care about their losses. They were robots.

Garen sliced through the robot beside Jarvan, his fourteenth kill in as many minutes. Even Garen, the most resolute soldier of the empire, could not last like this forever, as was evident from his panting and shoulders which hung a fraction lower than they had a half hour ago. This was the kind of battle that glory-hungry soldiers dream of, but

never actually happen.

Jarvan activated his Aegis as a jackal fired at a shot at him. The shield burst immediately, but the jackal was slain not five seconds later by one of the Vanguard.

"Where the hell," the red-armoured general panted, "Is the Master Chief?"

"I don't know, busy," Jarvan gritted out. He was annoyed at the lack of the Spartan too, but there wasn't much he could do about it. If the Spartan had found something more important to do, than he had something more important to do.

"What could possibly more important than the fight?" The general in red asked.

"I don't know!" Jarvan replied with angrily. "Concentrate on your own troops, General Luther, and leave the Master Chief to his own devices."

"â€|Understood, Sis," General Luther replied, grabbing his longsword tightly with both hands and moving away from the Prince.

"We really are in a spot of trouble, though," Garen said from his position beside the Prince.

"I know," Jarvan replied. "But we have to make do with what we have. At least the right flank and blue team are winning."

Jarvan swung his spear around in an arc to take the head off a lunging ranger. He finished it's arc and brought it up, pointing to the not-so-distant shapes of the Crystal Scar Nexus'.

"Men! We must charge forwards, and sweep them aside! Our goal is within sight!"

A cheer accompanied his words, the normal soldiery already tired from the intense fighting and wanting to end it as quickly as possible. If one final push was all it would take, then that was what they would do.

"That might not work," Garen said. "They could easily halt out momentum, and we don't have the forces to continue on like this."

"I know," Jarvan admitted. "But it's better than standing here doing nothing," he paused to stab a ranger through the head, "and it may be that the Nexus' are useless."

Garen made a 'hmpf' noise.

The silver-armoured soldiers began to assault their opponents with renewed and unexpected ferocity. Now that their end goal was within reach, they wouldn't allow themselves to be bogged down by the robots.

The mechs did something equally unexpected. They retreated in good order, leaving rangers too deep in enemy lines to fend for themselves.

The Demacians floundered, their enemy having eluded their blades. The automatons abruptly stopped retreating. They simply aimed their weapons and fired, indiscriminately killing without any sense of tactical order.

"Hell, not again with this," Jarvan complained.

"They seem to be a bit more desperate, though," Garen noted, several bullets of energy impacting against his armour and scorching it.

Jarvan thrust his hand out and shouted, "Demacians! Charge them and show them no mercy!" He then turned to Garen. "Have the left flank sweep out, and try to encircle them. We can force them to stop retreating that way."

Garen nodded and ran off to execute his orders to the full.

Garen activated his Aegis again and tossed his flag up simultaneously. As soon as the standard hit the ground he dashed to it, knocking up close to half a dozen enemies before he reached it.

The automatons immediately tried to lay into him with their blades, but a single sweep of his spear dealt with the group of them.

Demacian spearmen began to fill in through the breach Jarvan made, tossing away the semblance of a formation and simply stabbing at anything that came within range.

Two jackals started sniping spearmen from just the other side of the current mech line, and Jarvan dived right in to stop them. He blocked one descending energy sword with his spear, although it got a little dented in the process. He lashed out with his fist, taking his assailant's head off. Another blow shattered his aegis, and he retaliated by stabbing his attacker in the head. The blow inadvertently ripped through the first target and into a second target behind it, and Jarvan was forced to let go of his weapon in order to dodge another assailant.

He picked up a fallen spear and rammed it into the ranger's torso, breaking the haft of the spear with the blow. He grabbed the ranger with both of his hands and heaved, throwing it a meter away and allowing it to explode in the midst of its comrades.

He ran forwards, with nothing but his armoured fists as weapons, and tackled the two jackals.

One dodged far swifter than a mech had any right to, but he pummeled the other into dented metal.

The second took aim at his head at near point blank range, but it was annihilated by a bolt of magical energy. Jarvan stared at its disintegrated remains as a shadow crossed over him, and he looked up to see Kayle.

She floated above the battlefield almost regally, and with every slash of her longsword pulses of fire detonated amongst the mech forces.

Kolminye stood beside Jarvan, her obviously being the one who burned the mech to ashes.

The Prince got to his feet, giving a nod to Kolminye in thanks. She didn't notice, or chose not to.

A group of rampaging spearmen passed by him, and one of them happened to be a sergeant, and so the Prince tapped him on the shoulder.

"Get my lance," Jarvan ordered him as the dust of a hundred fighting soldiers and one angel rose above the battlefield.

* * *

><p>The Chief stood in the center of a pile of ranger scrap, staring up at the floatingâ€| thing.<p>

He wasn't sure how to kill something like this, since it didn't match anything that he had ever fought before. Theoretically, the crystal portion would be the weakest, but the problem with that would be the shifting metal plates. The Chief was sure he had nothing to penetrate that defence.

His second theory was to overload his shields atop the target, but that could might not actually affect the target, and then he would be defenseless.

He found himself seriously wishing that he hadn't wasted the last of his rockets back on the surface.

The ball shifted, the metal plates moving away from its center mass and allowing more of the blue light to spill across the room. The thing seemed to focus on the Chief, if that were even possible.

It spoke, then, in a cold metallic voice that sounded like many voices speaking in tandem. "We are a Collective," it stated.

The Chief kept his DMR trained on the target and didn't respond. After all, what could he possibly say to a floating ball?

That brought memories of the monitor guilty spark back to mind, and he pondered if it was possible this target was based off that forerunner machine. That would make the center of the eye the weak point.

The thing floated closer to him, and he took a step back. He didn't want to fire until he was certain he had a viable plan to deal with the target.

And it was not acting hostile. Not yet.

"We are a Collective," It repeated. "And we know of you, Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 of the Navy."

When a Spartan was shocked, they did not express it in human terms. They virtually stayed the same as they always did, and when in armour it was virtually impossible to tell how they were feeling. But in this moment, as the Chief's shoulders straightened fractionally, his hidden mouth parting less than a centimeter, and his body tensing

ever so slightly, he was shocked.

"We know of you, and ask why you d-d-d-do not join us, Master Chief Petty Officer John-117 of the Navy."

The Chief took note of the stutter. Was it possible that the thing had yet to be completed? That would surly explain the presence of the guard scarab.

The Chief's finger tensed on the trigger.

"We shall ta-take that as a no," it said coldly. It rose up above the Chief.

The Spartan began to fire on the target, his bullets doing little more than denting the crystal surface of it's core. In response the thing " the Collective " sent an arc of electricity " or magic " out towards the Chief, but he managed to dodge it.

He took cover behind one of the larger crystals mounted on the floor as the Collective floated above him. That's when he had an idea.

The Collective shot out another arc of energy that the Chief promptly avoided, while he simultaneously prepped a plasma grenade " one of the two he had left on his person.

The Collective floated over the large crystal mounted on the floor, and the Chief tossed the plasma grenade before running away as fast as he could.

The plasma grenade stuck to the crystal and detonated, sending a large crack along its surface, but ultimately achieving nothing.

The Chief swore beneath his breath, the first time he had done so in a long while. He prepped the second plasma as the Collective began to float higher.

As he tossed the grenade he hoped the orb wouldn't float out of range.

The plasma stuck to the floor-mounted crystal, and this time it detonated its target fully. The crystal exploded, waves of volatile energy spilling out from it and hitting the Collective on it's bottom half.

It swayed, but it appeared to still be in working order, much to the annoyance of the Spartan. It shot out another arc of lighting, and this time the Chief took it full in the chest. Even though his shields were still active, the energy bypassed it completely and shocked him.

The energy brought him to his knees. His armour was steaming in some places, but the rising steam was neutralized by his still-present energy shielding.

The Chief forced himself to his feet and tossed his DMR aside, drawing his magnum. He would need it for what he intended.

Using one of the large cables as a foot hold, he jumped up and grabbed onto the shifting plates of the listing Collective. In

response, the monitor look-alike tried to rise even higher up but the Chief was already firing his magnum right into the large crystal orb.

The thing gave what sounded like a shriek, or maybe a cry of machine code, or something to indicate its distress. It shifted the plates around again, and the Chief was forced to find other handholds lest he fall off.

That's when he noticed it. The shifting plates had just revealed it, a port very much like the Chief's own neural uplink that he had in the base of his skull.

The Collective tilted itself, dangling the Chief above the ground as it shifted the plates again. Knowing he would surely fall off this time, he overcharged his shields and slammed his palm against the plate that just passed over the uplink.

There was an explosion of force that knocked the Chief straight off the Collective and onto the ground. The Collective, for its part, began to list again. The plates that surrounded its body began to haphazardly shift, and multiple arcs of lightning sparked off of its body.

The Chief tensed on the floor as the Collective drifted into the Chief's maximum jump height. While he knew it was more than risky, he knew he could pull it off.

And so he jumped, grabbing onto one of them plates.

An arc of lightning hit him again, causing parts of his body to spasm and making his armour glow red from super-heating. Still he held on, waiting for the neural uplink to present itself.

There, a momentary glimpse of what he was waiting for.

He grabbed the thing jammed into the slot and pulled, a small wafer coming out. Just as it cleared the machine another arc of lightning hit the Chief, and this time he couldn't control his body and he fell to the ground.

The Collective flashed with internal light; once, twice, before detonating on the third flash. The lightning shockwave passed over the Chief, stressing his nerves near to the breaking point. His armour glowed red hot all over, and his shield systems were sparking severely. Red light bathed the inside of his helmet as armour warnings sounded.

It was over a full minute later, and the Chief just lay on the ground. His comms were dead, probably overloaded from the electricity. His helmet was black, all the armour systems having given out. They would need a complete reboot, that was for sure.

But that didn't matter. He brought his hand to his face, making sure his prize was still in hand.

A faint blue light pulsed out from the chip, and the Chief knew with certainty what he held.

"Cortana," he spoke, and the light pulsed brighter.

Oh well, he thought as darkness claimed him, _questions will have to wait for later._

* * *

><p>"What the?!"<p>

Riven stared at the stalker tank, which just a moment before had been in full life, slump against the ground.

Garen, who had just linked up with blue team and their forces, was equally as stunned. One in every three mechs was falling dead, completely inactive.

This was the same scene that replayed itself across the battlefield, ensuring once and for all a victory for the Demacians.

"Hell," Graves said, "He finished just as I ran out of cigars."

"Him?" asked Garen as he simultaneously coordinated his soldiers into an assault against the remaining mech forces.

"The Chief, obviously," Graves chuckled out. He pulled the trigger on his shotgun, and with a resounding boom the life of a zealot ended. "Who else could instantly turn the tables in favour of us?"

Garen nodded. He couldn't exactly hide the smile on his lips.

* * *

><p>Sorry, I was too lazy to upload the already-finished chapter earlier. Quick note, the Scarab battle at the start is supposed to be twice as long, but for some reason every time I upload the file the docmanager seems to delete most of it. I'm not sure why, so I'll try and get that fixed re-upload with the proper fight. It think for now this should suffice, though.

Maybe.

36. Chapter 36

Chapter 36: If I had a super weapon

Interlude

His body ached.

A lot.

But the pain was not a problem. He could survive that.

He couldn't tell where he was, and the whitewashed ceiling certainly wasn't helping him identify his location. He could rule out the league, at least. The medical facilities there had blue ceilings.

He tried to turn his head, but the muscles in his neck weren't responding properly, so he was forced to continue staring at the

ceiling.

No, wait, that was not right. He could feel his neck, and it didn't seem injured. So it couldn't be muscle injury.

A little belatedly he realized he still had his armour on. He hadn't realized it because his visor was devoid of the usual icons plastered across the screen, but it was still a rookie mistake. He hoped he wasn't getting rusty again.

He tried to turn his head again, but found that he still couldn't.

Armour lock down. That could be the only reason.

He didn't remember initiating it, though. Or had he? It was more than a little hard to recall what had happened earlier.

He did distinctly remember the white-hot pain of electricity and the feel of super-heated metal against his skin, though.

And the neural chip he had pulled from the Collective.

He couldn't see the chip in question in his immediate field of view, but that only made sense since the last place he would put a valuable piece of technology was on the ceiling. Still, he knew that item was important, and so resolved it would be the first thing he would recover.

But first he needed to get up.

He tried to speak, tried to say the words needed to end the armour lock down, but all that came out was a garbled 'nhhhg'.

He coughed to clear his throat, and then tried again. "Armour lockdown, deactivate."

He felt the change at once. The servos, neural links and muscle bundles all came online at the same time, making a gentle purr as they did so. His shields activated again with a crackle, filling up the bar at the top of his HUD. He rotated his fists first, to test if the lockdown had truly ended, and was satisfied when he felt them move.

He was fairly surprised, though, that the archaic voice command system still operated.

Hooray for small miracles, he thought sarcastically. Although, technically, the voice command system in his armour wasn't so archaic, since it was brand new.

"Whoa there," a feminine voice said, "take it easy."

The Master Chief turned his head away from the white ceiling and looked at the nurse who he assumed had just walked into the room.

"Wh-" Chief started, but was cut short by a cough. The nurse jumped at the noise, and moved towards the Spartan with a glass of water in hand.

The Chief brushed the water aside and tried again. "Where am I?"

"You're in Demacian field hospital number two, Kalamanda's crystal scar district," the nurse said. She tried to pass the glass of water over again, but the Chief brushed it off again as he tried to rise from the bed.

"Whoa there!" the nurse exclaimed. "Don't go so fast, you've been out for a while. The last thing we need is for you to strain yourself and faint again."

The Chief gave her a confused look before remembering he had his helmet on. "What do you mean, 'out for a while?'"

The nurse blinked. "You've been out for eight days," she said. "It is assumed to have been caused by a massive magical discharge, but we aren't so su-"

The Chief rose up from the bed " well, it was more of a metal slab, really " and tried to stand, but started wobbling. He was fairly surprised by his body's reaction, but jumbled nerves due to electricity would certainly make sense. He would just need to be more attentive.

The nurse moved as if to steady him, before realizing she would have no chance to stabilize the heavily armoured man. "You really should stay lying down," she said somewhat nervously. "So you can heal better."

The Chief ignored her, looking around the room for his weapons " and the chip.

"Lord Master Chief, sir, your" ah, teammate left your weapons on the counter over there," she pointed to another metal slab on the far side of the room, "and I'm to inform you your other possessions are at the lab."

The Chief started at the word 'lab', and the nurse noticed.

"P-p-professor Heimerdinger s-said it was just to help you out"

The Chief nodded briefly before going to collect his weapons. He knew the professor " sort of. He was too eccentric to be of any real harm to the chip and whatever it may contain. Or rather, whoever it may contain.

Still, he should be out of here sooner rather than later in order to ensure the safety of his 'possession'.

"I" ah" the nurse seemed at a loss for words. "I'll get your discharge papers immediately," she finally got out. Apparently she was not willing to argue with the super-soldier any longer. "Um" just so you know, your white haired friend was the one who moved your weapons. She also stayed here for quite some time during your" stay."

The Chief nodded, holstering his weapons. He was running low on ammunition again, but if the professor was here there was a chance he had ammo with him, too.

"Rightâ€|wellâ€|I'll go get those papers at once," the nurse stammered.

"Don't call me lord," the Chief said a little belatedly as the nurse left.

* * *

><p>The last time the Chief had seen Kalamanda â€" a whole eight days ago â€" was during the middle of an all-out war between medieval soldiers and advanced automatons. Surprisingly, as the Chief walked through the Demacian camp, he saw little of that hectic battle. Human bodies and mechanical scrap had been fully cleared from the battlefield, and tents had been erected around the little hut districts. The only thing left over from the battle was the tell-tale scorch marks of plasma and blast craters. The same thing he had seen on a hundred score battlefields before this one.<p>

There were plenty of soldiers milling about, some going through combat drills, others simply enjoying the scenery of Kalamanda. There were more troops than the Chief had expected to see, but that was only natural. The Demacians had eight whole days to reinforce and regroup.

Of course, that didn't exactly explain all the new standards he saw waving above the former battlefield, but he was sure he would learn it in due time.

He looked around for a lab, or something remotely resembling one. It wasn't all that hard to locate, really. Professor Heimerdinger â€" assuming Heimerdinger was the person in charge â€" seemed to have requisitioned an entire hut village area, ringed it with small metal walls, and placed a bunch of funny-looking steam pipes and crystal generators around it.

He began walking towards it, trying to pace his strides so he didn't fall over. While he had definitely lived through worse wounds, it seemed his electrical synapses had beenâ€| disoriented, making it slightly difficult to coordinate properly.

Soldiers he passed by stood a tiny bit straighter, and some even saluted him. He ignored them, mainly because he was certain they were mistaking him for someone else, and partly because it may indeed be their intention to honour him.

Despite his ignorance of them, every pair of eyes that he passed followed him. Or maybe it was because of his ignorance that they did so.

He reached the gate that gave entrance to the makeshift lab, and entered it. There were not any soldiers on guard duty, but perhaps that was because the area was already cleared â€" or because there was no one suicidal enough to enter Heimerdinger's lab.

There were banging noises coming from several areas around the facility, most likely the sound of something being constructed.

He tried to find something that would be considered a 'main laboratory,' but he wasn't so sure which of the buildings would fit that description.

The banging noises got a bit louder, and the Chief found himself looking around again for the source of the noise.

The banging increased once more, and the Chief looked to the left as his motion sensor finally lit up with contacts.

With one final bang the wall of the hut exploded outwards and a man in burnished metal armour flew out, tumbling across the ground before eventually coming to a stop.

"That didn't go so well", the man groaned, his voice corrupted by the face mask he wore, but still faintly familiar to the Chief.

The men in white lab coats "presumably scientists" ran out of the man-shaped hole in the wall and approached the armoured man.

"Sorry, sorry, this whole suit isn't really calibrated for" well, anyone," the first scientist said as he removed a blocky object from his coat pocket, and ran it over the armoured man.

"I still don't understand," the man in the suit began as he tried to rise up, "why you guys would make armour without an intended user or any user, for that matter."

The second scientist restrained the man, saying, "at least the armour system synced with you, so that's something to be proud about. Now, just remember to take it slowly " the armour will augment your natural abilities, but if you keep using your wind abilities like you do you'll just keep crashing."

Wind abilities?

"Yasuo, get up," the Chief ordered. Yasuo immediately popped up, looking around in confusion. When he finally turned around and saw the Chief, his entire posture changed.

"Chief!? Holy shit, you're alive?" he exclaimed, sounding more than a little surprised.

"Where did you get that?" then Chief asked, gesturing to the high-tech battle armour Yasuo was wearing.

"Oh, this?" Yasuo looked down at himself. "Professor Heimerdinger was doing a bunch of tests for the new armours, and I synced with this one really well, so I get to use it!"

The Chief stayed silent, fully taking in the armour and the implications of what it meant. The armour itself was fairly advanced; featuring angular, solid metal plates covering major sections of the body, and more flexible plates covering joints. Glowing orange lines were cut into the armour in some sort of pattern the Chief didn't recognize; probably some magical symbol or hextech arrangement. The helmet was an avian-looking thing of solid metal and a glowing T-shaped visor set into it, and a top knot of white hair spilling

out. Several pieces of cloth and scarves were draped around the armour in various places; although the Chief was sure they were there for decorative purposes.

In terms of weapons, Yasuo had a battle rifle presumably mag-locked to his back and an extremely high-tech looking sword sheathed at his waist.

The two scientists exchanged looks with each other, although the Chief could not identify the expressions on their face with any certainty. Worry, perhaps?

"So, Lord Master Chief," one of them began hesitantly.

"Why would you give an advanced piece of battle armour to him?" the Chief asked, genuinely perplexed. Yasuo had trouble using a battle rifle correctly, and the Chief was not eager at all to see him with this. "And where did you even obtain this armour?"

The first scientist responded. "Each armour system was constructed with data obtained from the wreckage of your ship, and data observed from you. Yasuo obtained this armour when he successfully synced with its rune system." The scientist shrugged a little timidly. "The professor didn't exactlyâ€¦ ah, plan who was going to wear the armour. He just made them, and waited for us to find someone who could actually use it."

The Chief looked down at Yasuo, who stood proudly with his hand on his sheathed weapon.

"â€¦I see," the Chief said.

"Oh, oh! You should come inside and see the rest of the gadgets!" Yasuo said excitedly. He turned and walked back through the hole he had created, not waiting for anyone to follow him. The Chief followed a minute later after making sure Yasuo wasn't about to come flying back out.

"It wasn't the best sync," the second scientist remarked to the first. The latter nodded as he jotted down some notes on a clipboard.

The hut was far larger on the inside than it had appeared on the outside. There were piles of materiel scattered about, and large crates bearing crystals and tubing were lying around haphazardly. There were several figures in the room, but only three were of note to the Chief. Mainly because each one was wearing the same sort of advanced armour like Yasuo.

The first was less recognizable than he had been before, but the Chief could tell who he was from his shouts of "Submit to the glorious evolution!" Viktor wore an up-armoured version of his normal attireâ€¦ or body, since he was fully augmented. He sported a metal skull mask, and instead of his usual third hand he had a strange laser type weapon on his shoulder. He was busy tinkering with the second man's suit, which sent out periodic sparks of blue lightning.

The second man in question was none other than Garen Crownguard, the Might of Demacia. His armour was very bulky, unlike Yasuo's. The

armour was thick and solid, making it look like it was hard to move in. several pipes ran out of the armour in seemingly random areas, and heavy bundles of cables could be seen under the heavy plates. Clutched in one hand was a large, angular blade. The blade was actually more of a collection of metal pieces rather than an actual blade, since it had no solid core. Blue electricity sparked off of it in cracks and pops.

The third person was someone the Chief had not seen for a while; the small Demacian spy girl, Luxanna Crownguard. She also wore the advanced armour system. Hers was still heavier than that of Yasuo, but lighter than her brother's. it was more curved than angular and featured decorative struts on the shoulder plates. The front of the armour had a glowing core set into it, but whether that was for a show or the actual power generator for the armour, the Chief did not know. In her hands she twirled a metal baton, much like her usual one except bladed.

They all noticed him as soon as he stepped into the room. Viktor turned away immediately, more captivated with his work than the newly re-awakened super-soldier. Garen simply gave the Chief a nod and stood stock still, allowing Viktor to finish his ministrations. Lux was the only one to move, running right up the Chief with lighter footsteps than her armour should have allowed.

"Oh! You're up!" she giggled, holding her baton behind her back with both hands and leaning forwards towards the Chief. "It's great to see you again? Do you remember me? How do you like my armour, huh? It doesn't have shields like yours does, unfortunately, and the power source seems weaker, but it's just as cool, right? And â€" "

The Chief put his hand on the girl's shoulder, stopping her incessant bouncing and speech at the same time. "It isâ€¦ pleasant to see you again, Luxanna. I would appreciate if you stopped fishing me for information now. Please."

Lux blinked. "Awww, but I didn't even get to start asking you yetâ€¦"

"Lux." Garen's stern voice reverberated from the other side of the room. "Give the man some room."

Lux reluctantly complied, returning to her spot.

There was a crashing noise as someone burst through a pile of scrap metal that was piled high in front of a door, on the other side of the room. "Is that the Master â€" ow, how did that get there- Chief?"

Professor Heimerdinger emerged from the pile, tinkering with some sort of prongs in his hands. He moved, or rather skipped, towards the Spartan without waiting for an answer.

"Professor," the Chief said respectfully. "I was not aware that you had planned to use my technology to createâ€¦ these."

"Hmmm?" Heimerdinger looked up, shoving the prong-thing into a lab coat pocket. "This was the most effective way to contribute to the war effort, is it not?"

The Chief didn't answer.

"These armour systems allow these men to fight on par with the enemy, who are as advanced as you are! As my friend says, 'evolve to advance, or fail and die.'"

"I don't say that," Viktor said while affixing some tubing to Garen's armour, "And I'm not your friend."

"I think this is my greatest project to date!" Heimerdinger cried out, oblivious to Viktor's remark. "I call it, Project: Steel Legion!"

"Yes, despite there being no actual steel in any of these armour systems," Viktor noted.

"Professor â€" the Chief began, but was unable to finish his sentence because the professor began to hop around.

"Look," he said, indicating Garen's suit, "This one utilizes a quad-health crystal system, making it extremely resilient and able to stay powered in most circumstances. It's centralized rune is static based, allowing it to create fields of electricity around itself."

"Heimerdinger â€" " The Chief tried to say, but was cut off again as the person in question stopped in front of Lux.

"This one utilizes an Aegis-type rune as its power source, inverted to provide internal benefits rather than localized ones. It's centralized rune is the custom Rabadon type, allowing for enhanced magical abilities in its vicinity and allowing for a temporary boost in power when needed."

The Chief didn't even try to speak, knowing he would be cut off again as the professor bounced over to Yasuo.

"This one might be my favourite. It uses a single Trinity rune as both a power source and an augments. It has no actual power of its own except the ability to augment the user's natural powers. It's really cool."

Yasuo gave the Chief a thumbs up.

"Even if the pilot can't properly use it," Heimerdinger finished.

Yasuo sagged over.

The Chief shook his head. "I still protest, professor. This is quite a â€"

He was interrupted for the third time by a new voice.

"Chief, don't you t-think you should cut him some slack? I mean, they do look cool and all that."

Chief shook his head, as if to clear it. It was almost as if he had just had a dream, and was still in the process of waking up. After a moment of hesitation, he said timidly, "Cortana?"

Heimerdinger removed a small unit from the inside of his lab coat. It looked like a small speaker, and blue light seemed to float above it.

" 'Sup," Cortana said.

The Chief was silent for a few moments. The atmosphere became tense, and a little bit oppressive. The other people in the room exchanged brief glances. "Cortana, I expect you to remain professional at all times, especially in our current situation."

"You have not seen me in how long, and that's the first thing you say to me?" she complained. "I was just trying to lighten the mood."

"â€|So it really is you," he said with an air of finality. Her single sentence was enough to cast away the Chief's doubts as to the identity of the voice. Not that they were large doubts; he was fairly certain he had a good grasp on how his enemy liked to play things now, and this fit perfectly with that.

Not that that was a particularly reassuring thought.

"Of course. Mostly."

"â€|What does 'mostly' mean?" the Chief inquired, a note of worry in his voice.

"It's probably better for us to explain this part," Viktor said, finishing up with his work. "You see, as best as we could understand from you perfect friend here, she's in more than one place right now. As in, this is one piece of the entire whole."

"You know," Yasuo remarked, "you make less sense than the lightbulb when you explain it that way."

Viktor continued on, ignoring the Ronin. "If we were to venture a guess, she has been split up into multiple pieces of herself in order to control otherâ€| 'Collectives,' was it?"

"Yes," Cortana affirmed.

The Chief stared at the little speaker. "But you areâ€| you, right? The same Cortana that was with me on the rings?"

"Yes," Cortana affirmed again. "Really, you make it sound like there are others of me."

"Technically there are," Viktor added in.

"There are simply other forms of me, like how a rampant AI has different parts of themselves. I can't remember for certain, but I think I was split off in the same way."

"Most of her memory is vacant," Heimerdinger said. "Most things done to her must have been stored in the Collective's central core." Heimerdinger gestured to a particularly large pile of scrap near the wall. "Unfortunately, the core is no longer functioning, so we can't find out what she really knows. Oh, and much of her processing

capacity has been reduced. And she isn't able toâ€¦ what was the word? 'network'. And she can't - "

"I cannot do much of what I was once able to," Cortana finished, sounding almost mournful. "I can still give tactical data with the proper uploads and a database, but â€œ"

"But you're still Cortana," the Chief stated. "That's enough. We can find the rest of you later and put you together."

"I don'tâ€¦ actually, that might work," Heimerdinger said, picking up a crystal circuit from the floor and playing around with it. "Assuming the collective work in the manner we assume, there should be no more than two of them. And if the pieces are simply split copies of one central, then it should be no problem at all to rejoin them."

Viktor tried to shrug, an oddly human gesture for the cyborg man. "So long as we get an intact core next time, I'm fine with that."

"Chiefâ€¦" Cortana said softly.

"I'll put you back together again," Chief said. "You have my word."

"Ain't this touching," someone chuckled from behind the Chief. "Normally I would say 'just hug the gurl already,' but I don't think two machines would do that."

The Chief turned around. "Graves," he greeted neutrally.

"I had come to tell you guys that the council wants to see the new suits in action, so you should get ready," Graves smirked. "But since the Chief's up, I might as well say that there's a council session going on. Riven's been fillin' in for ya, but they tend not to listen to her cuz, well, she's Noxian."

Yasuo made a noise.

"If yer feelin' up to it, you should probably head over there. Maybe you'll get 'em to stop wastin' time around here," Graves finished.

"I don't know If I would exactly recommend that," Heimerdinger said thoughtfully, "since you are still healing and all that. However, I would dearly like the authorization to use my creations in combat, so go for it."

The Chief hesitated. It wasn't like he was tired or anything, he felt fine enough to continue his current activities. It was more like a reluctance to engage in more political talk; yes, that was it. He was suited for that kind of stuff alone.

But he wasn't alone, not anymore. He had Cortana, and she had seen him through plenty of things like this before.

Chief turned to the professor and held out his hand. The professor cocked his head, saying, "it may not exactly beâ€¦ safe to use your companion right now. There may be hidden issues that could compromise

your health again " or you armour."

The Chief kept his hand out.

Heimerdinger passed Chief the black device, and the Chief pulled the chip out. He stared at it for a few seconds, watching the light play across it's surface, before plugging it in to the back of his helmet. He felt the familiar spike of coldness as the chip was accepted by his implants.

Numerous sigils appeared on his visor, indicating sync status and upload rate. It took longer than usual, but that was only to be expected " Cortana was no longer encased in UNSC technology.

After a few seconds, an icon appeared that indicated his mike was being used by a third party.

"Still plenty of room in here, I see," Cortana said sarcastically.

"Where am I going?" the Chief asked Graves, ignoring his newfound companion.

* * *

><p>The pair " or rather, the single person and his AI " walked across the dusty ground. The council chambers had been set up at the center of the Crystal Scar, nearest to the convergence point of the two nexus' magic. It was all rather abstract to the Chief, to put it lightly, so he did not give it much thought. He had plenty of other things to occupy him, though.<p>

"Did they do anything harmful to you?" the Chief asked his partner on the internal mic. If anyone had been looking at the Spartan right now, and there were a great many people doing that, they would see him walking silently and purposefully.

"I'm f-fine, Chief," Cortana replied.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Anything out of place with me is not their doing."

The Chief's mood darkened at that. He knew just who's fault it was, but lacked the knowledge to find said person.

"Chief, stop worrying. It's unbecoming."

"I'm just making sure you're operational," Chief said stiffly.

Neither of them said a word for a full minute. The Chief knew that because he kept one eye on the timer in the corner of his visor.

"Your friends are n-nice," Cortana said at last.

"That stutter is worrisome," the Chief noted. Cortana snorted, or as close to a snort as an AI could manage.

"I'm fine," she said. "And don't change the conversation."

"â€|They're not my friends," Chief answered.

"Well, they fooled me pretty well," she said pensively. "And I'm a smart AI, we don't get fooled."

"You are a split-up artificial intelligence with a stutter."

"That's not nice. Especially after your friends went to such lengths to make you feel better." Cortana opened several files in the Chief's databanks and began downloading everything he had learned since coming to Runeterra onto her chips internal storage. "You should have seen; the Yasuo kept yelling at people to get you blankets because you might be cold, Riven wouldn't let anyone into your room, Thresh and Graves kept making sure your care went smoothly."

Silence again.

"Oh, and you are c-calling them 'blue team'", she added.

"â€|I concede the point that these people may indeed be my friends," the Chief said.

Another chuckle.

The Chief knew Cortana extremely well, and he could tell from their limited conversation â€" although it was longer than any they had ever really had at any one time â€" that this was, indeed, his companion for many years. She did seem to be a bit quirkiest, a bit easier to amuse, but he chalked that up to the fact that she had just been split. After all, she said she had been separated in the same manner as rampant AI's do, and rampant AI's are just the emotional parts of the AI's inner core. This could simply be the moreâ€| outgoing form of Cortana.

Regardless of the reason, he was simply glad he had her back, and was not going to allow a single quirk to stop her from helping him again.

He briefly considered asking her to send him a diagnostic of herself, just so he could check it over and make sure she really was fine, but decided against it. She may be at a fraction of her processing power, maybe she couldn't remember things, and maybe she was more emotional than usual, but if she said she is fine, then she is fine.

The Chief stopped outside a large white tent. It was easily five times the length of any other one he had seen so far, and it could probably fit fifty people. Five flags swung above it. The first two he recognized quickly, for he had sent them numerous times before, most recently on the battlefield of Kalamanda. Beside those two flags of Demacia and the Institute of War was a white flag composed of two superimposed triangles. He did not recognize that one at all. The last two were both blue. The Chief was pretty sure the lighter of the two belonged to the avarosian tribe in the Freljord, and if that was true, the other probably came from there as well.

"Are we going in?" Cortana asked.

The Chief moved forwards towards the entrance. Two members of the Dauntless Vanguard stood on guard outside, but as the Chief neared them they saluted, fists over their hearts, and made way for him.

He entered the tent, and was assailed by the harsh purple glow of magical fire. Why they would use lighting in the middle of the day, the Chief did not know, but that wasn't all that important right now.

There was a circular table in the middle of the room with a map of Runeterra on it, around which people were standing. The Chief recognized most of the people: there was Jarvan, the two generals from before, Riven, Ashe, Tryndamere, High Councilor Kolminye, as well as several others.

Looks like the numbers had swelled from before.

All of the people in the room immediately noticed the Chief in their midst. Some of them bore confused looks on their faces, while a few - Riven in particular - had expressions of relief.

"This should be good," Tryndamere chuckled.

The Chief walked up to the table and took his spot beside Riven. Everyone continued staring.

"We were not, ah, aware that you had awoken," the red-armoured general said, and almost simultaneously Riven said, "Glad you're up."

"Well, we might as well get on with this. The council recognized the Master Chief," Jarvan said, taking a bite out of a plump green apple-looking fruit. "We were just discussing our next course of action."

"Which would be what, exactly?" asked the Chief. Information was what he needed to formulate a plan for proper victory, as well as find the rest of Cortana. He only hoped he could get this to go smoothly, quickly, and efficiently.

Several people at the table exchanged looks and whispered, which Jarvan promptly ended with a raised hand.

"Well, we have not decided if we are going to continue onwards, or stay here and fortify," the red-armoured general said, looking to the advisors behind him.

"And as I have already said, we have fortified more than enough already. The time to act is now, while we have the advantage," Kolminye said, sounding annoyed. She looked disheveled, as if she had not gotten any sleep the night before.

"Talks for peace are still entirely possible," the gold-clad general said pleadingly, his palms held out as if in supplication.

"No!" Ashe and another platinum-haired woman shouted simultaneously. They both glared at each other from their places opposite of the table before turning away.

"There is no chance for peace. They threw that option away when they

attacked us for no reason," Ashe finished.

"Have you tried contacting Noxus yet?" the Chief asked.

His only answer was silence.

"They might agree to help us if you issue the formal apology they wanted," the Chief ventured. He wasn't so sure why half the council seemed so hesitant all of a sudden. Was a joint military venture between Demacia and Noxus not the most viable course available?

"Well," the gold-armoured general began hesitantly, "we have yet to agree on whether Noxus has had a hand in this or not."

"Are we seriously still on this point?" Kolminye demanded fiercely. "We have not seen any evidence pointing to their involvement at all! This is simply superstitious stupidity on your end, general Tiangco."

The gold-armoured general, general Tiangco, stiffened at the insult. Jarvan put a restraining hand on his general's shoulder before turning to the Chief. "Do you agree with Kolminye? Do you think Noxus is innocent in all of this?"

"Yes," the Chief said without hesitation. If he was honest with himself, he wasn't sure if Noxus was innocent. He was also smart enough to realize that any sense of doubt in his answer would have been seen as a weakness and would have lessened the validity of his response.

"I second that," Riven said from beside the Chief.

"So what, exactly, do you propose on doing?" the platinum-haired woman asked, leaning forwards on the table. The Chief took note of her heavy, fur lined armour. It was a safe assumption she was also from the Freljord.

"Link up with Noxus and pool our military forces in order to locate and subjugate the enemies' main stronghold," the Chief replied. It wasn't like he had said anything profound, but the looks on some of the faces around the room made it appear to so.

"Nice," the platinum blonde said, before turning to face Ashe. "I like this one."

"Naturally," Ashe said, rolling her eyes.

"That may be risky," the red-armoured general said. "Besides the obvious fact that they may indeed be the enemy, the mechs would almost certainly stop us from reaching there."

"Wow, these people are so indecisive," Cortana said over the internal mic.

The Chief switched to the internal mic system too. "Do you have anything to convince them?"

"Maybe," she said. "But it's better if you tell them. It might get a bit confusing if they hear a women's voice coming from you all of a

sudden."

"Understood."

"Alright, tell them, based on the enemies' pattern of assault, their center forces are most likely centered farther south. Their base could not be in Noxian territory and move in the manner they have."

"How do you know this?" he asked. "I thought you couldn't access information."

"That's all the data you've found out so far and stored in your armour. I'm reduced, not invalid. Please."

The Chief switched back to the external mic and spoke exactly what Cortana had told him.

"That's certainly plausible," Ashe said thoughtfully.

"Of course it's plausible," Kolminye snapped. "The more time we waste here, the easier it is for the enemy to coordinate and recuperate. They obviously have incredible manufacturing capabilities, so can we just _decide _already? Before they attack again?"

Jarvan snorted. The two generals by his side and several others in the tent began to protest, stating reasons why they should put off any sort of decision.

"I say that we march for Noxus immediately " peacefully, of course," Tryndamere announced.

"Eh? You can't just begin a vote without the consent of Demacia, you kn-," general Tiangco tried to say, but was interrupted by Jarvan IV, who raised his hand and agreed.

"The Winter's Claw has your back, then," the platinum-blond said, almost mockingly.

Ashe rolled her eyes again before also putting her hand up. Kolminye put her hand up to, as did Riven.

"Hm." Jarvan muttered pensively. "Is this a majority vote, then?"

"Not exactly," the red-armoured general said. "It is currently six-eight, so that means " "

"Great!" Jarvan declared. "Majority vote wins. I'll set up everything we will need for a diplomatic mission to Demacia."

"But my lord, that is not " "

"Anything else?" Jarvan asked the assembled leaders, a little bit louder than necessary. "No? Good. Everyone is dismissed."

The Chief stood there for a few seconds. People began filing out, Kolminye in particular nodding to him as she passed him by. Jarvan was locked deep in conversation with his Freljordian allies, and Riven stood patiently by the Chief's side. Deciding he had had enough

time in the political environment (regardless of how brief it may have been), he turned on his heel and left the tent.

* * *

><p>"You managed to do in ten minutes what no one could do for over a week," Riven said, a little bit ofâ€| something in her voice. "That's pretty awesome."<p>

"Yeah, who knew the Chief was such a _talker?_" Cortana said teasingly, making Riven jump.

"So you're, uhâ€| in the suit?" Riven said tentatively.

"Yup. Now I get to walk around with this neanderthal all day," Cortana replied.

"I see," was Riven's confused reply.

"Since I know the Chief's confused right now," Cortana said, "I might as well explain. Long story short, Riven and I became acquainted when she tried toâ€| relocate me to Heimerdinger's lab."

"Okay," was the Chief's one word response. Always the best kind of response to give, in his professional opinion.

They walked on for a few more steps before the Chief abruptly stopped, turning around face Riven. "There were several people at the meeting I did not recognize," Chief said. "The woman in heavy armour, who was she?"

Riven turned her head to the side. "She's Sejuani, leader of the warband called the Winter's Claw. Apparently she was also attacked by mechs, and after seeing they were worthy enemies, decided to march down here."

The Chief found that rather odd, but there was no point in mentioning that. Maybe that was some form of social conduct he had yet to learn about. "And the white flag above the tent?"

"The whiteâ€| uh, I'm not so sure," Riven spoke with a frown.

"That would be the flag of the Special Envoy," Cortana said. "Made because, technically, Zaun and Piltover can't be at a war meeting. This way, they are counted as special advisors."

The Chief paused. "Why can't Piltover be here? Are they not allies with Demacia?"

"Oh, right," Riven said. "You've been out for a while, so you wouldn't know. All of Piltover's forces have been recalled to the city. There's been a massive armed uprising, all under the command of the Triad." She shrugged. "So I guess that's why they can't be here."

"A full-scale revolution? That's too convenient to be a coincidence," the Chief said.

"Without a doubt. But it's not like we can do anything without their asking, and they have not asked," Cortana said.

The Chief turned away, staring out at the fields, thinking. It would make the most sense to march out now, in order to keep the rest of the city-states as safe as possible. It would "

"Chief? Master Chief?" the Chief was broken from his thoughts by a harsh-sounding voice.

He turned around to find the platinum-blonde haired woman wearing the heavy armour walking towards him. Well, it was more of a march rather than a walk. There was an undeniable ferociousness in her gait and in her eyes.

The Chief's body reacted on some unconscious level to the open hostility, making his heart beat a bit faster, his fingers tightening of their own accord, the familiar pump of adrenalin beginning to rush through him.

He forced it all down when she stopped in front of him. It wouldn't be beneficial to kill a political leader because he could not control himself.

Sejuani stood in front of him, her hands on her hips, as she studied the Spartan.

"Something wrong?" Riven asked, a little bit of hostility in her voice. The Chief put it down to the two having some sort of less-than-friendly encounter in the past.

Sejuani gave a snort of laughter as she looked over the Exile. "Nothing that concerns you, clearly."

Riven bristled at the comment.

"If it concerns me, it concerns my team also," the Chief said. "Unless this does not concern me."

Sejuani huffed. "I wanted to see what you were like up close." She leaned in closer, bringing her finger close to the Mjolnir. "I like the armour."

The Chief took a step back, knowing she would harm herself the moment her skin brushed the energy shielding that surrounded him.

"Apparently you're tough," Sejuani said with a shrug. "And you seem like you know what you're doing. I think we can help each other."

"How so?" the Chief said, genuinely curious. He was not sure why she would not bring up this 'help' during the meeting, where it could have been put to better use.

"The Winter's Claw needs strong people, and we are the strongest warriors you will find around here. I'm sure if yo " "

"I'm not interested in joining anything," the Chief said abruptly. While he was fairly politically inept, he knew he should have seen this coming.

"That was fast," Sejuani said with a raised eyebrow.

"I'm not interested in joining anything," the Chief repeated firmly.

Sejuani chuckled. "Understandable. Personally, I hate joining things too. Political gains, economic gainsâ€¦ it's all just a way for the weak to weed off the strong. So much better when that stuff is all swept away."

"Wow, this lady is seriously messed up," Cortana said over the suits internal mic. The Chief was inclined to agree with her.

Sejuani gave a mock bow, saying, "See you around, Lord Chief. It'll be a pleasure watching you work this all out." With that, she turned and marched away.

"That wasâ€¦ odd," Riven said, blinking.

"I get this feeling like we were being tested, but I can't figure out what," Cortana said out loud. "Probably because I'm using all my processing power trying to sort through the Chief's mess of a database."

"I don't know what you just said, but I agree," Riven said.

The Chief tilted his head, wondering how it was Cortana and Riven were getting along so well. It was a little bit odd.

Then another thought occurred to him.

"Why is everyone calling me lord?" he asked.

"Oh, right," Riven said. "Should have mentioned that. You see, in recognition of your efforts, Jarvan and the High Councilor decided to grant you a piece of land and a title. Or something."

"â€¦What?" the Master Chief asked, perplexed.

"Well, considering the Chief's habit of crashing every single vessel he's ever been in, I don't have much faith in the longevity of that land," Cortana said thoughtfully.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

The alarm was repeating, and it annoyed the hell out of professor Stanwick. But the annoyance was a secondary concern â€" after all, the blaring object signified that someone had broken into the prototype sanctum, and that was a problem.

One which he would be sure to rectify immediately.

He walked towards the iron door with a squad of zealot-pattern mechs at his back. He made sure to bring overwhelming force, since he could not risk the destruction or theft of his prototypes.

The door opened with a heavy clunk. What was inside made him pause. After a few moments he waved the zealots down, and they backed off,

leaving Stanwick to enter the room alone.

"Why ?" was all Sanwick asked. He knew his short query would be enough to get him a sufficient answer, to which he could then formulate a proper response. Possibly one that required lethal force.

The man in front of him rolled the massive shoulders of the armour, and Stanwick noticed the fact that the suit had fully synced with the man. Interesting.

The man turned around, the joints of the black armour making grinding noises as they moved. The man clenched and unclenched his fist, seemingly relishing the power the armour gave him.

He looked up, the green-tinted T-visor glaring at Stanwick. "I need something more powerful in order to kill the Master Chief."

Well, no point in killing the man yet. But more information could never hurt. "I thought you preferred speed to strength," Stanwick said. He did, in fact, know his contracted warrior was partial to agility. That was how he had optimized his armour and gear in the past.

"The Master Chief is faster than me even with your augmentations, and much stronger," the man said. "This way, I get the resilience I need to survive his hits, and strike back with force equal to his own."

Stanwick cocked his head. "You realize maintaining a proper sync rate with this armour causes great strain upon the user, yes? It will be difficult, and incredibly painful."

"I'll read the manual later," the man said sarcastically, raising a long, lightning â€"wreathed falchion in one hand. He gave it a few test swings, chopping through the air successfully. He gave a satisfied grunt and sheathed it.

"May I inquire as to how you survived?" Stanwick asked, curious.

"I had my Guardian Angel rune," Marin said, shifting his stance with a mechanical growl.

"The last one in our possession," Stanwick stated. "Was it worth the use?"

Marin cocked his head, possibly wondering what Stanwick was asking. He then turned around, picked up a sleek black case, and tossed it to his employer.

Stanwick caught it smoothly and opened it. Inside was a single rune; a soulstealer greater rune. It was partially frosted over, but completely intact.

Stanwick gave a particularly cold chuckle. "Successful as always," he said. "I suppose I can give you that armour."

"And the weapons," Marin added, hefting a large, blocky pistol-like weapon.

"And the weapons," Stanwick amended.

The two stood there in relative silence, the only real noise being from the suit of armour Marin wore.

"I suggest you prepare yourself," Stanwick said as he briefly glanced around the room. Good. All the other prototypes were intact. Unfinished, but intact.

Marin looked back to his employer.

"Another attack is in the works, in order to secure the second element to the master plan."

"Am I allowed to know what this plan is?" Marin asked in a neutral tone.

"That is only for me to know," Stanwick said, turning away. "And if you do your job properly, there will never be a need for you to know."

Marin glared at professor Stanwick as he calmly left the room.

* * *

><p>This chapter was done a long time ago, but this site was down for me, some gateway error. so sorry 'bout that. At least it's longer than usual, right?

Probably not. Anyways, thanks to everyone who reviews, it does help me write. So, ah...

C ya.

37. Chapter 37

Chapter 37:

"_We do indeed have permission to enter Noxian territory, with a maximum guard of six hundred troops. I know some of you have not beenâ€| onboard with the idea, but we are going there and that's all there is to it. Divided we will lose, or so I have been told." The Prince took that moment to gaze over everyone's faces and one helmet, trying to make eye contact with each. "With careful deliberation, I have decided on who will accompany me and those who will organize the army here. General Aldahn and General Tiangco will stay behind, awaiting the reinforcements from the Freljord and Demacia respectively. General Luther will accompany us, as will the Tryndamere and Sejuani. The High Councilor of the League will come as my personal quest, and the special envoy along with blue team will come as an honour guard. Make no mistake, this will be difficult, but we can do this. This might not just be the end of this war, but the endless war that has plagued our nations since long before us. Dismissed." â€" Prince Jarvan Lightshield IV, warleader of the united army_

* * *

><p>The Master Chief used the free thought time he had during the

march to Noxus to think things over. For the most part, that consisted of trying to come to terms with the new Cortana â€" after all, she wasn't who she used to be, and he was sure she would fall under the category of 'compromised UNSC materiel'. But he wasn't about to end her over something he was so uncertain about.<p>

And there was also the incident he had with the High Councilor, just before he had left. She had entered his 'quarters' â€" a metal slab in a tent â€" and began preaching about the dangers of Noxian rule. Apparently, she was afraid that Noxus would take advantage of a weakened Institute of War and try to make a move for power, which would mean that city was the most dangerous place for her to be. It was also the most important place for her to be, apparently. She needed to show how strong the Institute really was, and the Master Chief was vital to that plan.

It was not like he wanted to be used as a political tool. He had not signed up for that, nor had he agreed to do anything of the sort. But he did not really see any choice in this scenario.

And then there was also the fact that the High Councilor had seemed just as disheveled as the day the Chief had reawakened, and that was more than a little bit suspicious. Unfortunately, he was not sure what that could possibly mean, and neither was Cortana.

So really, he had no choice but to follow along with what they wanted. At least until he had more information.

The Chief's foot crushed something â€" judging from the sound, a rock most likely â€" and it snapped him out of his thoughts.

"Hey Chief," Yasuo called out from his position roughly ten meters away at two o'clock. "Can I â€" I mean, can we sit in the carriage now?"

"No," the Chief answered back, sweeping the area through the iron sights of his assault rifle.

"Have we not already covered this?" Thresh said in his grindingly melodic voice. "We are on point."

Yasuo swung his battle rifle over his head in exasperation. "We've been on point for the entire trip!" he exclaimed. "That's two days!"

"And we will continue to stay on point until we reach our destination," Chief said, effectively ending the conversation. While he was certain Noxus was not behind the mech uprising, that did not mean their lands were completely automaton free, and he preferred to have his team in the best position to intercept them.

There was a laugh from one of the carts nearest to the Chief, and Yasuo managed to hear it from his position. Quite angrily he snapped, "Stop giggling, damn it," before clutching his BR tightly to his chest and grumbling.

The Chief spared a glance towards the carriage. Inside of it were all the munitions that Heimerdinger had been able to carry with him from the _Forward unto Dawn. _It wasn't much, but at this point everything was a welcome addition to his floundering armoury. Most of it

consisted of ammunition for the assault rifle and magnum, but there was battle rifle ammunition and shotgun shells also.

There had also been a few more plasma grenades and one frag, which he had been sure to pocket.

The only new weapons in the cache had been an SMG, with enough ammunition to keep it firing for a while. He had left that one in the cache, since he preferred his assault rifle over it. It was more effective against the mechs anyway.

The highlight of the cache had been significantly larger and more powerful: a functioning M6 Grindell/Galilean Nonlinear Rifle, more commonly known as the Spartan laser. Upon seeing it, the Chief had let out a grunt of appreciation, which was (according to Riven) was the most emotion he had shown thus far.

Regardless, the Spartan laser was the most potent firearm in his armoury now. Despite that, or because of it, the Chief would have to save it for when it was needed most. It was still nice to know he had an 'ace up his sleeve,' as Cortana had put it.

But that hadn't been all Heimerdinger had given him. Apparently he had created more of the communication devices the League had supplied, albeit ones of a more reliable sort. There were only a handful of them, though, so communication would still be spotty.

And then there was also the matter of his personal assistant and the little girl, sitting in the back of the cart. Reighlen insisted he was there because he was the Chief's aide, and it was his duty to be by his side to help him in all matters, but he suspected it was because he wanted to try out his new Summoner skills. He wasn't so sure about why Annie would have come down, and he was against the idea of having a child in the field of war.

Unfortunately, that was not his call to make. And it was also hard for him to deny her skill, or what little of it he had seen at the attack on the Institute.

"We're getting close," Riven noted. She was furthest on point, but her voice carried easily enough in the desolate environment.

"She's right," Cortana confirmed, bringing up a map " one of the ones he had recorded while at the institute " and overlayed it with blue team's estimated position. "We're roughly half an hour out, if these maps are accurate."

The Chief glanced around again. Something felt off, out-of-place. Maybe it had to do with the fact that they had seen no enemy contact since " well, since the battle of Kalamanda, and that hardly counted as recent.

"No point in worrying," Cortana said over the internal comm.

"How " "

"Your heart levels were slightly raised, as well as the response-oriented center of your brain," Cortana explained. "Really, I may not be a-as good as I used to be, but I'm still pretty damn good."

The Chief was silent for a moment.

"That you are, Cortana," he said slowly. "That you are."

"â€|Why do I detect a minute amount of sarcasm in your voice?"

The Chief stayed silent. He refreshed his motion sensor, but it did not detect any enemies nearby. Still, that didn't shake the feeling he had.

The feeling of being watched.

* * *

><p>"That'sâ€| somewhat intimidating," Yasuo confessed. The Chief felt inclined to agree with him.<p>

Noxus â€" or the large mountain that made up half of it â€" was shaped like a leering skull, staring down at the plains where the Demacian army was assembled. Walls of stone ringed the base of the mountain, which in turn was protected by a large moat, which was surrounded on all sides by a sprawling town.

"It's a weird construction," Cortana said pensively, "but I have to admit it has a sort of aesthetic charm. Minus the skull, of course."

"Of course," muttered Yasuo. He still looked somewhat intimidated and somewhat angry as he stared at the city.

Graves and Thresh looked at it with indifference, as if they had seen the like before and were not impressed.

Riven glowered at the city, her face set like stone.

The Chief briefly considered asking her if she was okay, but decided against it. It didn't seem like she wanted to be bothered.

"Soâ€| ah, how are we planning to get in there?" Yasuo asked. "It looks like a fortress."

"That is because it IS a fortress," Jarvan said, coming up beside the Spartan. He looked just as grim as Riven did, possibly even more so. He pointed towards the urban sprawl. "There are gatehouses at the cardinal points of the city, each one extremely heavily defended. If Noxus has kept their end of the bargain, we can march right in. if notâ€|"

"They have," the High Councilor said, also moving up. "If they had not, their army would be lying in wait for us."

"Right. Because, you know, Noxus is that nice," Yasuo scoffed, earning him a glare from Kolminye.

"Well, no point in delaying," Jarvan said. "Might as well get this over with." He turned around and began giving orders to the assembled company leaders, getting them into a better formation. Appearances count, and all that.

"Spartan," Kolminye said. "You and your team will stay in the front, alongside us." She gestured to herself and Jarvan. "Do be on your guard. It is all very peaceful around here, to the point of being dangerous."

She turned and walked away, most likely in order to organize the few Summoners that had accompanied the army.

"On point again?" Graves chuckled, tossing his cigar to the ground. Cortana had already commented on them, asking the Chief how it was possible for someone to carry and smoke so many. "Must be my birthday."

"Right?" Yasuo looked over at Graves expectantly. "See, I'm not the only one thinking this is stupid."

"Children, children," Thresh said smoothly. "Let us not argue and simply enjoy the bounty of souls we could be reaping."

Everyone was quite.

"Well, that shut them up quickly," Cortana commented over the personal comm.

"I'll try and remember it," the Chief replied sarcastically.

It took about twenty minutes for the Demacian army and allies to reform and for the march to begin. All very inefficient in the Chief's mind, but there really wasn't anything he could do about it.

The closer they got to the city, the more desolate and ramshackle everything became. The ground was cracked and grey, and the houses were clearly falling apart. He wasn't the only one to notice it, either. Yasuo had commented on it, and the High Councilor had told them it was because only the poorest of the Noxian population lived outside the walls.

Fairly brutal in the Chief's opinion, and he had witnessed some pretty brutal things. It was no wonder the Demacians had been so against coming here.

They were stopped just before they reached the city limits. Standing in the middle of the road was a man, dressed elegantly in gold and purple robes. Behind him were a troop of soldiers, each garbed in gold armour and green robes. There were only a handful of them, thirty-three according to Cortana, and they wouldn't pose any problem if any fighting started.

Jarvan stepped forth, handing his javelin to Xin Zhao as he did so. He raised his right hand in greeting.

The man stepped forth also, meeting Jarvan halfway across the dusty road. "Greetings, honoured guests of Noxus," the man announced. "We welcome you to our lands."

"â€|Right," Jarvan IV said, his face devoid of emotion.

Maybe the speaker had been expecting something to be said in return, or maybe he had expected a different reaction from the prince, but as

a result he faltered when Jarvan gave his response.

"Youâ€|you have been instructed to make your way to the grand palace, where negotiations will take place."

"Instructed?" Yasuo asked, his voice no more than a whisper.

"You are allowed to bring with you a guard of ten. We hope to leave immediately, so please, make haste your priority."

Jarvan stood silent. When he finally spoke, his voice dripped with hostility. "Well, since you asked so nicely, I'll do just that."

He turned back and walked to the assembled leaders of the host, conferring amongst them. At a wave from Kolminye, the Chief joined them.

"I congratulate you on your ability for self-restraint," one of the Summoners said to Jarvan.

"Yeah, I was pretty sure you were going to take his head off," Sejuani laughed.

"Ten men is not nearly enough," Tyrndamere said, staring at the messenger with hate. "That sounds exactly like a trap."

"Which is why it must be sprung," Kolminye said. "Walk I with head held high, ready for peace. If they are the ones to initiate war, then everyone will know of their treachery. There will be no room for doubt."

"Generally speaking, I'd rather not become a martyr," General Tiangco said, his hand on his chin.

"I don't think any of us plan on doing that," Jarvan said somewhat harshly. He looked around the group, thinking, before speaking again. "I will go, as will the High Councilor, Tryndamere, and Sejuani. That should account for all the leaders here."

"That simply leaves the matter of the guards," General Tiangco said, clearly unwilling to argue with Jarvan.

"Blue team is going," the Chief stated.

Everyone else looked to him.

"That takes up five out of the ten allotted guards," Sejuani noted.

"And they will be well worth it," Kolminye said. "They have fought the enemy more times than the rest of us, making them experts."

"Alternatively, Demacia has fought Noxus the most, making us experts," said General Tiangco.

"We are not fighting Noxus," the Chief said. Everyone looked to him again.

"Okay, whatever," Sejuani sighed. "I want Olaf on this guard."

"Are we seriously just going to go along with this?" General Tiangco complained.

"Yes, yes we are," Jarvan said in a serious tone. "I'll take Garen, Xin Zhao, and Lux along. That makes nine."

"I got nobody," Tryndamere said. "I'm more than enough."

Kolminye rolled her eyes. "Fine, Kayle shall take the last spot. Ten guards."

"â€|Glad we got that settled," General Tiangco muttered, unnoticed by the others.

"Hey! Messenger dude!" Tryndamere called out loud, drawing the attention of said messenger and everyone else nearby. "Are we allowed to bring weapons into the city?"

The messenger responded with a 'no'.

Tryndamere sighed and kicked the ground. Jarvan shrugged and handed his spear off to General Tiangco, who once again was confused. "Are you seriously just going with this?"

"Child, you need to learn that you don't anger your hosts," Kolminye said in a patronizing tone.

The group began to argue again, and the Chief took the moment to retreat away, heading for the cart where his ammunition was being stored.

Hit team followed him, and they each stored their weapons in the same manner he did.

"Y'know, Chief," Reighlen said, "I'm kind of surprised you're leaving your weapons here. You didn't strike me as the type toâ€|" at the Chief's glaring visor he fell silent.

"Are you guys going to kill bad guys?" little Annie asked.

"No yet," Cortana replied, allowing the Chief to maintain his silence.

"Ohhhhhh, there's a pretty lady in the suit!"

"â€|No," the Chief said. He gave Annie a brief glance before returning his attention to his assistant. "Keep this safe. And be ready to come to me, if I ask it of you."

Reighlen nodded. "Okay," he said, before pausing to think. "Wait, I have this really cool idea! I've recently learned the charms needed to bond minds with a Champion. I can link to you like on the Summoner's Rift!"

"Two people I-in one head?" Cortana asked. "That might get a b-bit cluttered."

"No, it'll be fun," the boy exclaimed.

"Have you tested this before?" The Chief asked.

"No."

"â€| Have you seen it in action before?" he asked again.

"â€|not really, no."

"â€|I don't think this is a good idea," the Chief concluded.

"No, it'll be great!" the boy shouted, standing up from the cart.
"Okay, now hold still, I just need to remember the wordsâ€|"

The boy began to recite something indecipherable, something that sounded very much like a chant. It brought back memories of the Covenant, with their religious chanting and zealotry.

It took several minutes, but eventually the Chief felt a change. It was not the same feeling he got when being Summoned, but it was pretty close.

"This isâ€| odd," Cortana said slowly. "Is this how it feels to share a head?"

"You don't have a head," the Chief replied honestly. He nodded his thanks to his assistant and moved away from the carriage.

Cortana sighed theatrically.

The Chief could see the army leaders reassembling â€" or rather, finishing their argument â€" and he assumed that was his cue to return to them.

He made it about ten steps before he was stopped and pulled aside by Riven.

"Going in there is a bad idea," she said, keeping her eyes on the outline of the mountain city.

"It'll be fine," Chief replied, moving away again.

"You know," Cortana began, "maybe she just doesn't want to go in there."

"What makes you think that?" the Chief asked, wondering if he would need to pull Riven off the guard team. It wouldn't be any good to have a less-than-one-hundred-percent teammate.

"Just call it 'womanly intuition'."

"â€|No."

* * *

><p>The group of fourteen followed the messenger and his troupe through the ramshackle city that surrounded the walls of Noxus. Distaste was evident on the faces of everyone in the group, but the Noxians leading them payed no heed whatsoever to the people around them, guests or otherwise.<p>

It really was the slums, and it galled the Chief to think that these ruined buildings were the first line of defense against attack. It was needlessly brutal, especially for someone like him who had been brought up to protect humanity at all costs.

The continued on, reaching the gate house to the inner city. It was just as heavily defended as he had been told, with nearly a small army defending the area. If the Demacians had been hard-pressed to attack this place, it would have been a bloodbath for certain.

The Chief was not entirely sure he would be able to fight through the defenses here, either.

Noxian soldiers turned to glare at the passing group, some snickering, others just staring. Some of them whispered things out, and the Chief was able to catch words like, 'demons', 'bluebloods', and 'exile'. The group ignored them, for the most part. Yauso and Riven could not help but stare back at the soldiers.

The gates were already open for them, so they passed through into the actual city, and the difference was immediately apparent. The housing, while still not the best, was undoubtedly better than what the Chief had seen outside. The homes were made completely out of stone, and they seemed to be in fairly good condition.

The people living in them were a different story. They came out, narrow eyed, and stared at the passing men. Each one looked shifty, and some appeared outright dangerous. The Chief found himself, on several occasions, reaching for his weapons that were not there.

Olaf tried to tap on the stone of the housing with his axe, but was stopped by one of the soldiers moving with them. He did not seem too pleased about that, and went out of his way to tap every other stone he could see after that.

The Chief could not decide if Olaf was better with them, or without them. He seemed skilled, and his physique certainly pointed towards his combat proficiency, but he seemed temperamental and reckless. That could prove to be a problem.

The further they got, the more impressive and wealthy the housing was. The city also rose upwards, and each new block of housing took up a higher tier. It seemed that there was a direct correlation between the quality of housing and the higher up the mountain they were located. He also noted with some annoyance that his maps did not include the multi-tiered nature of Noxus, and so he made sure to have Cortana map it all out.

The only thing that did not seem to change was the citizens. They had the same shifty, narrow eyed expressions which the Chief could only describe as world-weary. He was not sure what made the people like that, and he was not entirely sure he wanted to find out.

They rose higher still, heading for the large palace that took up the topmost portion of the mountain. The higher tiers were clearly defense works for the palace, but meant to look natural. Numerous buildings were scattered about, massive in size. Clearly these were the noble homes, and each one looked to be as wealthy as any of the city blocks below.

Kayle stared at the housing here, but the Chief could not decide what she thought was so special. But that was not the only thing she was staring at.

She sent periodic glances at the Chief, and though he could not see her face, he could tell she seemed amused. He was not sure why, but he resolved to find out later.

The number of elite guards intensified the closer they got to the palace. By the time they reached the front gates, the Chief had counted enough guards to form a legion. In all probability, they were.

They stopped in front of the palace gates. They were large, ornate, made of gilded black iron. Rubies studded the topmost edges of the doors.

There was also a man standing before them. The Chief recognized him as Darius, the hand of Noxus; a champion he had fought several times before on the fields of justice. Apparently the other champions and Summoners in the group recognized him; too, because their demeanor changed once they saw him. The Chief just wasn't sure whether it was for the better or worse.

Darius nodded to the messenger, and the man bowed quickly before retreating with his band of soldiers.

"You going to show us in?" Jarvan asked Darius, a cocky smile on his face.

Darius huffed in response. He turned away from the group, and at some unseen command, the gates opened with a harsh grinding noise.

He moved in without a word, forcing the group to follow along blindly.

"This fe-els like a trap," Cortana noted privately.

The Chief agreed with her. Unfortunately, there was not much to do but spring the trap.

Hopefully he was just overthinking things.

The palace was dark, almost like a cave would be. The Chief was sure that everyone else in the party, or at least those not used to the dark, would be having trouble seeing things. That would be a serious tactical advantage to the enemy.

Darius led them through several halls, each one climbing higher up, and always going forwards. The halls were fancy in an archaic sort of way; most of the decoration being carved pictures gilded with silver. The floors were covered with red carpets, but their hosts did not seem to mind them getting dirty by fourteen pairs of feet.

They encountered many elite guards inside the palace, each one armed with a long polearm. They also bore purple robes instead of green ones, possibly making these ones royal guards. Or so the Chief theorized.

They stopped suddenly outside of another door, this one made of red wood and pearl.

"Be on your best behavior inside," Darius said. He knocked on the door thrice, and then stepped into the room.

Kolminye quickly stopped the group, making eye contact with Sejuani, Olaf and Tryndamere. "The three of you," she said, "stay silent as the dead. We cannot jeopardize this."

Sejuani scowled, but the other two nodded in some sort of understanding.

Kolminye stepped back, and everyone entered.

The room was massive, larger than the throne room back in Demacia. It was less ornate, but far more impressive in terms of scope and scale. The ceiling was high and arched, and large windows ran across the walls of the room, admitting just enough light to see. The floor had inlaid pictures, some depicting battle, others depicting events in Runeterra's past that the Chief was not aware of.

Most of the others looked impressed, too. The only exceptions were Riven, the High Councilor, Jarvan and Thresh.

Not that Thresh had any expression other than mildly annoyed.

There were several figures in the room already, most of which the Chief recognized. The ones he did not were dressed in fine robes, and were most likely nobles, maybe advisors.

The other ones were far more familiar, since the majority of them were League Champions.

Katarina was there, perched on a high-backed chair, her feet propped up on one of the long rectangle tables that stretched the length of the throne hall. She payed little attention to the group, instead focusing on sharpening a wicked dagger.

A red haired and red-suited man stood with the cluster of nobles, and though the Chief did not know his name, he recognized him from the league rosters. It also helped that Cortana brought up a picture of him, pre-recorded from his time at the league.

There was LeBlanc, the deceiver, standing closest to the throne. She wore her usual attire and had a smirk on her face. She gave a theatrical bow to the group, and said, "Welcome to the court of Noxus. We are so very glad to have you." She turned her head slightly to stare at Riven. "Most of you."

Riven bristled but otherwise did not move, Chief noted with some satisfaction.

"Come now," the figure on top of the throne said, "no need to be so hostile."

Swain stood up from the black throne, descending the two wide steps until he was level with everyone else.

Jarvan moved forwards one careful step, staring down Swain. Swain did

the same in return.

"Funny, us meeting without you stabbing me with something," Swain said with a half-smile.

Jarvan did not smile back.

"We have come to beseech you to help us in our fight against the common enemy," the High Councilor spoke, moving in between the two rulers.

Swain raised an eyebrow at her. The unnatural raven on his shoulder screeched. "I thought we had made it abundantly clear we would not help you without an apology from them." He jerked his head towards Jarvan. "If he is prepared to do that, then please, begin."

Silence reigned throughout the court.

Kolminye looked to Jarvan, who simply set his jaw and stared straight ahead at the throne.

"Thought not," LeBlanc said, lifting her nails and admiring them.

The Chief sighed internally. This was definitely not going to plan.

He stepped forwards but remained behind Jarvan and Kolminye, giving them respect as commanders.

"Champion Swain," the Spartan started, realizing a little bit late that he did not know what Swain's proper title was. "I am not Demacian, and so cannot apologize on their behalf. However, I understand that Noxus played no part in what has happened. It would be mutually beneficial if we combined our forces, in order to secure this world once again."

Silence again.

The Chief stepped back as Cortana whispered, "nice speech."

Swain chuckled dryly. "The Master Chief. You seem to be everything that has been attributed to you. Too bad I could not face you on the fields of Justice and judge your worth myself."

"Maybe we can," the Chief offered.

"But only if we work together," the High Councilor added, glaring at Jarvan.

"Ahâ€¦. Yes, what she said," Jarvan mumbled out.

"Well, that's reassuring," Katarina commented from the table. She seemed to be wholly disinterested with the ongoing negotiations. She had another set of daggers on the table, too, and the Chief was fairly certain he had not seen those upon entering the room.

"I will not lie," Swain said. "I was advised to not except your plea for help, and instead make a move forâ€¦ personal gain."

Some of the advisors behind the master tactician stiffened.

"However, some of you have made a decent argument. These are not normal times, and I dare say things are going to get far worse. Already I have had reports of movement along my borders."

"Well now," Cortana said. "That's interesting."

"I will allow you to make your case to me, and possibly gain the assistance of Noxus," Swain finished.

Jarvan tilted his head slightly before nodding. He and Swain began to talk, with mostly calm words passing between them.

But the Chief was not paying attention to that. He stared at the odd creature perched upon the leader of Noxus' shoulder, the six-eyed raven. It was staring at the Prince oddly, and the Chief could almost swear he saw a spark of intelligence in its eyes. That made him almost nervous; he did not relish the idea of being this close to a potential enemy without adequate intel.

Still, he could make it work if needed.

Swain took a step back from the prince, and the Chief switched his gaze from the bird to it's master.

"It is probably more prudent to continue these matters in our war room," Swain said, gesturing to a door just to the right of the throne.

"Of course," Jarvan said smoothly, moving towards the door before Swain could.

Swain's face betrayed nothing as he watched Jarvan walk. "Please, tell us if you desire anything," he said, directing the comment towards the honour guard.

Clearly they weren't invited in, too.

"A question," the Chief stated, earning raised eyebrows from both Swain and Kolminye. Deciding that that was an invitation to continue, the Chief asked, "Who was it that was following us the way here?"

Katarina looked up sharply, her dagger making a clinking noise as the tip hit the grindstone at the wrong angle. Swain simply looked to the Chief with a somewhat bemused expression.

You've been caught," Swain said to nobody as he also began to make his way to the war room.

A man dropped down from the roof of the room, seemingly cloaked in roiling shadows, landing smoothly. He gave a swift bow, saying, "My most sincere apologies, my liege."

Katarina snorted. "Getting rusty," she called out.

Talon shot her a glare.

The Chief watched the hooded man, recognizing him, too, from the fields of justice. Talon, the blades shadow, one of the premier assassins of Noxus. It made sense that he would be the one stalking them.

Tryndamere gave Talon a respectful nod before he, too, moved towards the war room.

Sejuani barked out a laugh. "Getting found by a giant in armour? That's too good."

"Your senses must be dull if you could find me," Talon said coldly. "Have you anything to offer your team but weakness?"

Sejuani ground her teeth together and moved forwards, but was stopped by Kolminye, who ordered her into the other room. She obeyed after shooting one final look at Talon.

Talon moved away also, heading towards the table where Katarina was sitting.

Kolminye turned to the honour guard. "This is now a matter for us leaders. Stay here, and try to play nice," she said, then focused on the Chief. "Good job, for your words and your perception. Now, if you could do something else for me?"

"Yes?"

"Go outside the palace. I want you to scout about. There is something off, but I cannot tell if it is the cause of the Noxians or worse."

The Chief nodded, and Kolminye retreated.

"Yaaaay, scouting runs," Cortana pretended cheered.

The Chief ignored her. He paced towards blue team. As soon as he neared them, he told them of his plans, and told them to stay put and listen for anything suspicious.

Graves took that the best, immediately jumping onto the nearest chair and producing a flask of alcohol from somewhere.

Yasuo tried to do the same, but simply ended up breaking the chair because of his new armour.

Thresh remained standing, staring at his lantern as if watching something.

Riven stared at the Chief.

"Something wrong?" Chief asked. He really could not tell what was going on with her.

"You're just going out there?" she asked.

The Chief replied honestly with a 'yes'. Riven shook her head. "You don't know anything about this place. I'm going with you."

The Chief started to protest, but was cut off by Cortana. "That

sounds great. Now let's hop on it and get going!"

The Chief sighed.

* * *

><p>Their feet tapped along the paved ground, leaving no trace of their passing. The entire area " more like a plateau than anything else, and most likely man-made, as theorized by Cortana " was covered in stone, leaving none of the original mountain visible.<p>

The pair had been moving around for nearly half an hour, with no sign of anything odd and no signal from their leaders to return. In the end, the Chief just started following Riven around, since this entire job seemed fruitless.

After some bickering and persuasion, they eventually got a table at an open caf  near the edge of the plateau. It overlooked Noxus, showing the entire city in all of it's dark splendor.

The Chief also noted with some admiration that the area was layed out in such a way that it could be used as a defensive wall. It was rather clever thinking.

Riven sipped at her tea, staring out at the city, too. "It's an interesting place," she said.

The Chief did not respond, since he knew nothing of these matters.

"I used to live here, you know."

The Chief stayed silent once again.

"Say something," Cortana practically hissed over the internal comm.

"I  gathered that," the Chief said, and for some reason Riven smiled.

"I used to be the poster child for the city," she said, calmly sipping her tea. "Before I became an Exile. It sucks, because everyone knows me and knows what I've done." She shook her head. "It's like a shadow you want gone, but can't ever be rid of because it is a part of you."

"Tell her it's not what you've done, but how you've lived," Cortana hissed again to the Chief.

"Why?" he asked, perplexed. "Her concerns are a genuine proble-"

"Do it, Chief," Cortana said.

"It is not what you have done, but how you have lived," the Chief said aloud.

Riven looked over at him with a funny expression.

"You could have worded that better," Cortana noted privately.

"I said exactly what you told me to say," the Chief retorted.

"Thanks, Chief," Riven said, oblivious to the private conversation going on.

They both looked back over the city.

After a few minutes, Riven pointed to a square plaza mid-way up the sloping mountain. "That's the entrance to the Underground."

"And that is?" Chief asked. This could be useful.

"The Underground is essentially a small city in the caverns beneath the mountain," Riven said. "It's where all the really shifty stuff goes on, where the really bad things happen. It has barely any guards, and so it's almost complete anarchy down there. It's the place where I grew up."

The Chief blinked. Thatâ€¦ was something he did not know, and for some inexplicable reason, he felt bad about it.

Riven continued on, undeterred. "Beneath that are the catacombs, which stretch on for kilometers. Most of them are dungeons, but some are said to be repositories of lore and arcane knowledge. Most of them are owned by various nobles, though. hilariously, those are better guarded than the Underground."

"Interesting," Cortana noted out loud, and Riven raised an eyebrow. "Lore and arcane know â€œ"

The Chief slapped the side of his helmet, hoping Cortana would get the idea and shut up. He was rewarded with an 'ow' from the A.I and an amused look from Riven.

The only sound for the next few minutes was the sound of Riven sipping her tea.

Finally, she started to speak again. "Chief, listen, I have to tell out tha-

"What's that?" the Chief interrupted.

Riven heaved out a sigh, rubbing the side of her head and turning in the direction the Chief was looking. She brought her cup to her lips before what she was looking at finally registered in her head.

She dropped the cup.

Lights, hundreds of them, possibly thousands, moving towards the city. A veritable sea of enemies, moving towards the mountain fortress.

"That'sâ€¦ uhâ€¦" Riven was at a loss for words.

How had an entire army sneaked up on Noxus?

The Chief stood up. He looked toward the waiter, who seemed just as shocked as Riven was to see an army on his front lawn.

"I need a weapon," The Master Chief told the man as the first siege constructs began to fire.

* * *

><p>Sorry that this took so long to come out, I had a bit of writer's block trying to make this a good transition chapter. Sorry about that.

Enjoy the chapter, I guess. Review if there's anything you want to say. If not, have a fine day.

38. Chapter 38

Chapter 38: Home Field Advantage

The Siege of Noxus, part 1

The explosion was the first thing that told the Master Chief that the battle would not be in their favour.

The side of the palace had just exploded, a massive column of fire and rubble launching into the air.

He ran with his borrowed blade held low by his side, Riven some ways behind him. He could not afford to waste time and move slower in order for her to keep up. The battle would not allow that.

He ran right up to the main gates of the Noxian palace, and moved right through them as if there were no guards. It wasn't like any of them could stop him, even if they tried.

Inside, it was as if all hell had broken loose, which it technically had.

"There's less smoke in here than I thought there would be," Cortana said. "So that rules out high-grade explosions â€" most likely a partial structural collapse."

It was a reasonable assumption, so the Chief decided to treat that as the basis for the enemy attack. Of course, that left some problems. A structural collapse would only be effective in the lower, vital structural points of a structure, but the palace was set into a mountain. A collapse like that would not be viable.

That would mean the attack would need to be carried out on more squishy targets â€" namely, the leaders of Noxus and Demacia respectively.

The Chief sped up, his feet leaving impressions in the cold floor.

The doors to the throne room were open, and so the Chief went inside quickly. Surprisingly, there was no damage inside.

It was possible he was wrong.

Or not. There was a group of people talking frantically with each

other, and Kolminye was in the midst of them. Blue team was just some ways away, possibly standing guard. The assassins and Darius were absent, as were Tryndamere, Sejuani, Jarvan and Swain.

He marched up to the High Councilor, ignoring the confused glances blue team gave him. He knew they were confused, but there would be time for answers later. First, the Chief himself needed answers in order to formulate a proper plan of defense.

As he got closer, he could tell that things were bad.

The High Councilor locked eyes with him, and moved past the group to meet with him.

The Chief spoke first. "High Councilor, There is a â€"

"There is an invading army, yes," Kolminye said, waving her hand. "Which is utterly irrelevant compared to this." She gestured to the people behind her.

The Chief tilted his head, and Cortana said, "What?"

"Theâ€|Leaders got into an argument and started moving about, and then there was the explosion." She shook her head. "We haven't seen them since."

The Chief hesitated. "Theâ€| war leaders... are missing?"

Kolminye nodded. "And quite possibly dead. And these fools can't decide on who should lead. The generals have already decided to fight their own battles, so any real cohesion is near impossible."

The Chief was confused. That was extremely problematic. Not to mention the fact that the enemy had somehow breached the palace and managed to plant a bomb. Or sabotage. Either one was a significant problem.

"We have yet to make contact with them, or even clear out the rubble," Kolminye continued. The Chief looked to the left and saw through the open war room door that soldiers were moving around pieces of rubble.

"Why do you not assume command?" The Chief asked, trying to think of how he could swing this in their favour.

"Me?" Kolminye repeated, almost in disbelief. "They would not allow the League to take nauthority over their forces. They would never allow that."

"But thenâ€| how do we fight off this army if we cannot coordinate?" The Chief asked. He had fought in countless battles before without a chain of command, but never something like this.

Kolminye shook her head. "It's not looking good, that's all I can say."

"They've breached the third concourse!" one of the advisors shouted, holding some sort of device in his hand. The rest of them started to panic even more.

Cortana pulled up a map of Noxus, the newly edited one he had copied from the league, and highlighted what was labeled as the third concourse. It was dangerously close to the southern gatehouse, just opposite of where the allied army was camped.

He hesitated for a second, and then started moving forwards.

"Enough," he spoke. His voice was low, but instantly commanded attention from everyone in the room. "I am taking operational command of the defense of this city. I expect full cooperation."

The advisors stared at the Chief. Only one of them spoke. "That's not possible," the man said, sneering.

"Then the city will fall," the Chief stated. "For those of you who want to help, this is what you must do. Get everything you would normally require to prosecute an effective defense of this city, and get some sort of communications system set up. I will lead from the battlefield, and the High Councilor," the Chief gestured behind him, "will be in charge of things here. Anything you tell her will be relayed to me."

None of the advisors said a word.

"Are you all incompetent? Start moving!" Kolminye barked out, sending the advisors into frenzy — this time, one of actual activity.

"Chief, are you sure?" she asked.

Cortana replied for him. "We have this."

She nodded, slowly, before raising a hand. "In that case, I will attempt to link our minds. Be ready."

The Chief stood straight. It went down in much the same way as Reighlen had done it, only it felt much — smoother. Yes, that was it.

Kolminye opened her eyes. "You are — already linked," she said with a frown. "Will this be a problem for you?"

"No," the Chief said, already starting to walk away. He gestured for his team to follow.

"Wow," Graves muttered. "Ya got the High Councilor herself in yer head, huh?"

"Not that big of a deal," Cortana muttered.

The Chief wasn't paying attention. He reached out with his mind, trying to link himself back to his assistant. He was having a bit of trouble, and it seemed that the distance between them was the major factor.

_Reighlen, _he thought.

_Chief? What the hell is going on? _The boy responded, panicked.

There is a battle going on. I will explain later. Can you get into the city? Bring the cart of weapons?

_That might be a bit hard, _the boy responded. He seemed a bit flustered.

_Do it, _the Chief thought to him. _Tell them you have permission from the highest authority. Use this bond to find me._

I'llâ€¦I'll try, Chief.

â€¦_Thank you,_the Spartan thought back hesitantly. He was aware that he was quite possibly sending the boy to his death, but the city was also the safest place to be right now. It was a win/lose situation no matter what, though.

But the Chief made sure to turn into a winning position, no matter what.

* * *

><p>The ranger-pattern automaton cleaved right with its arm mounted energy blade, but the Chief slipped under the blow and returned with a strike of his own, loping the mechanical creature's head straight off.<p>

Another came at him from the left, but the Chief simply stabbed his borrowed blade through its skull, instantly turning it into a dead weight.

A third mech was dispatched by three arrows fired in quick succession, curtesy of Graves.

The rest of the mechanical beings had already been dismantled, so the Chief took the lull in the fighting to observe the large object in the idle of the mountain plaza. It was somewhat like a drill, with a space large enough for a demi-squad of rangers to be transported. Clearly, the thing had drilled up through the ground of Noxus and disgorged it's troops into its beating heart.

"You think there are more of these?" Thresh asked, laying his hand atop the burnished metal.

"Most likely," Cortana said, answering the question for the Chief. "There would need to be over a dozen to make an impact on a city of this size. If I had any satellite footage, I could have tracked their movements â€" "

"But we do not, so we can't," the Chief said. "We need to continue on to the southern gatehouse."

"And the civilians?" Yasuo asked. The area they were in seemed fairly populated, and the mechs had killed nearly a score of civilians and several guards before blue team had put their rampage to stop.

"They'll be fine," the Chief assured. He turned away and began to move, heading in the direction of the southern gatehouse. Truth be told, what he had told Yasuo was a little bit of a lie. In all

likelihood they would not be safe, but far worse would happen if the automaton army got a foothold in the city. The most effective action here would simply be to press on.

Everyone fell into step with the Chief, slowly speeding up to a sprint.

"I didn't know ya cared for the Noxian crowd," Graves told the Ronin. "Though ya hated 'em."

"I hate them, but that doesn't mean I'm a butcher," Yasuo said, and ended the conversation there.

Graves grunted.

"Just stop," Yasuo said. "You know I hate your accent. No reason to speak more than necessary."

"Ya wanna fight?"

"I want silence," the Chief said, turning down another winding street.

There was silence just as he demanded.

The further they pressed on, the more hectic things became. Soldiers were moving along the streets to pre-designated points, while civilians ran further up the mountain fortress. There seemed to be no coordination whatsoever, and civilians were getting trampled by the uncaring soldiers that marched through.

The group tried to push past, but the going was slow. Very slow.

The Chief looked around, trying to find some high-ranking soldier.

There, a lieutenant soldier leading the troops forwards through the crowds.

The Chief moved up to him, people naturally making way for the large man. "Lieutenant," he called out, drawing the attention of his intended target and nearby soldiers.

The Lieutenant blinked. "Who are you?" he asked nervously.

"Spartan one-one-seven," the Chief responded. "I need you to have your men evacuate the area as swiftly as possible, and set up a defensive line when you are done with that."

"Wait, what?" the man's nervousness changed to outrage. "Who are you to think you can give me commands?"

The Chief internally sighed. It was going to be annoying if this happened every time he tried to order soldiers around.

"You know," Cortana said over the private comm, "Noxians respect strength."

The Chief wasn't sure what that had to do with anything, so he tried

to " _ah._

"I'm the person who's going to finish this fight," the Chief told the man, drawing closer to him. "I am aware that, right now, you have no orders from anyone higher up. If you think you can survive like that, than try it. If you do not, you will assist me."

The lieutenant was silent for several long moments. Finally he reluctantly agreed to the Chief, ordering his soldiers into more organized lines.

Leaving the Lieutenant to his task, the Chief and his team moved down the somewhat clearer roads that led to the southern gatehouse.

"They're beginning the siege," Riven whispered, looking up. Flaming projectiles were racing through the sky above the city, each far away impact sending out shockwaves of force, which could be felt from where the group was standing.

"Faster?" Yasuo offered, and the Chief nodded.

The moved through the streets quickly. The closer they got to the gatehouse, the more hectic things became. Soldiers were moving in random directions with no sort of organization, other than their pre-designated formations.

_Kolminye, _the Chief sent to the High Councilor. _Have the Noxian's in the southern gatehouse district to blockade the streets._

_I can try, but there is no guarantee I can get these people to do anything I say, _she sent back.

_That's fine, _the Chief mentally responded.

A large rock smashed into a nearby building, turning half of it into rubble instantly. A squad of soldiers were caught in the falling rubble, but no one seemed to notice. A steady rumbling accompanied the falling rock, making the ground shake slightly.

"Does anyone else feel that?" Riven asked.

The Chief looked at the ground. Pebbles and small rocks were bouncing up and down, as the ground shook harder.

The ground ahead of the group suddenly split open as another of the drilling transports broke through, rising a half dozen meters above the ground. As the tri-drill atop rotated to a stop, the door on the side opened and a squad of rangers jumped out. They immediately began to fire, cutting down several of the tightly packed Noxian soldiers.

The Chief charged in without hesitation, smashing the first of the rangers to the ground with momentum alone. The second died similarly, and the third was crushed by his armoured fist.

Half of their number kept their attention on the Noxian troops, while the other half began to stab at the armoured giant with their energy blades.

The first slash was absorbed by the Chief's energy shielding, and the second one was parried by his curved blade.

Thresh's scythe lashed out and vertically bisected one of the rangers, and two more were taken down by Graves' return fire. The Chief briefly wondered how Thresh had gotten hold of his Scythe, seeing as he had left it behind, but just put it down to ghost magic.

Riven and Yasuo waded in with their own borrowed swords, cutting down the rangers with swift strokes. The Noxian swords were extremely effective, much to the surprise of the Chief. They cut through the enemy armour like it was leather, making them much deadlier than their Demacian counterparts. They did not seem to be as sturdy, however.

The last ranger was put down, a sword pinning its skull to the stone ground.

"I shouldn't have to say this," Yasuo said, "but this is really bad."

"Is he always like this?" Cortana inquired aloud.

"Pretty much," Chief responded, already moving forwards.

Graves snickered.

"Chief?" Cortana asked. Well, her tone was more stating than asking. "The Noxians are staring at us."

The Chief turned around and found that the Noxian soldiers were, indeed, staring. He just couldn't place the look on their faces. Surprise, maybe? They had just seen a drill pierce the ground beneath their feet.

"You might want to start like this," Cortana whispered, as if they were on stage and the Chief had forgotten his lines. "Soldiers of Noxus!"

"Cortana," the Chief said firmly, quieting his AI companion.

Several more flaming stones flew overhead, crashing somewhere further into the city. Already the Chief could hear the sounds of arrows being released, and he was certain that meant the enemy was within range of the walls.

"Soldiers of Noxus," the Chief began, taking up from Cortana's prompt. "We are going to take your city back. Join me if you want to win."

"Well! short, brief, and to the point, I guess," Cortana said.

"Irrelevant," the Chief said. "It either worked, or it didn't." the Chief turned to Riven. "How can we get on top of the walls?"

Riven pointed to blocky building. "Stairs are located inside the guard points."

* * *

><p>The battlements that the Chief was hiding behind offered sufficient cover from the oncoming enemy fire, but the high-energy rounds were slowly witting down the stone. Return fire consisted mostly of arrows and bolts, which were much less effective than gunfire.<p>

It seemed the Noxians were just as against the use of guns as the Demacians were.

The Chief rose above the battlements with his borrowed crossbow and let loose a single bolt before ducking again. He couldn't be sure if it hit anything, but there was a good chance he did.

A flaming ballista round smashed into the crenellation a couple of meters away from the Chief, piercing through it and the soldiers hiding behind it.

"What. The. Fuck," Yasuo said, staring at the hole where the crenellation had been.

"You're in the middle of a siege. This should not be unexpected," the Chief said, gesturing to the hole.

"Well, yeah," Yasuo agreed, rising up over the battlements to fire a crossbow bolt. "But it's still surprising."

"Ya went through the battle for Ionia," Graves said. "Did'n' ya? You've seen this all before."

"We don't talk about Ionia," Yasuo snapped, and Riven flinched.

Another pair of ballista bolts passed over the battlements, too high to hit anything but still dangerously close.

_Two siege towers, approaching near the gatehouse proper, _Kolminye sent to the Chief. Information exchange between the two of them was brief, presumably because the inflow of information was making everything hectic over there.

_Understood, _the Chief sent back. _Have two squads guarding the streets take up positions here._

He did not receive a reply back, but he already knew his order would be obeyed to the letter. They had done it several times already, and the High Councilor knew when to listen.

He motioned for his team to follow, and started running south, towards the gatehouse. It wasn't all that far away, but the winding nature of the Noxian walls and the smoke rising from the fire of siege weaponry was making visibility and maneuverability less than would be optimal.

But the Chief had fought through much worse, so this wasn't difficult.

"Chief," Cortana said over the open comm, "Duck."

The Chief ducked immediately, years of military training causing him to act instantly. Riven also ducked, her military training also kicking in. Graves ducked slightly slower, while Yasuo and Thresh did not duck at all. Luckily, they were far enough away that the massive stone, flung from some trebuchet, missed them by centimeters.

"Holy hell, that was close," Yasuo stated, staring straight ahead with wide eyes.

The Chief rose up and continued walking, as did Riven and Graves.

"How did you know that was coming?" Yasuo inquired, directing his question towards Cortana.

"I can still do stuff," the AI explained. "I'm not invalid. I'm just"

"An invalid," Yasuo finished, grinning.

"He's an idiot," Cortana stated. "Can we strangle him, please?"

"Not now," the Chief said, directing a line of Noxian archers. The walls were still lacking in troops, due to the missing grand general. All the other generals were trying to gain power by running off on their own, and it was nearly impossible to coordinate with them.

They finally reached the section of the southern wall designated as the gatehouse. It wasn't a gatehouse in the sense that the Chief would know it, but rather a fortified complex, more of a mini fortress.

"There," said Thresh, pointing, "the siege towers."

The Chief nodded, eyeing the towers. They were fairly large, most likely able to carry around forty troops (or so Cortana said). They were heavily armoured, and featured some powerful anti-infantry weapons.

"Archers!" the Chief called out at full volume, "aim for their supports!" He pointed for good measure.

None of the archers obeyed. Most fired at the oncoming mech horde, perhaps hoping to thin out their numbers somewhat, while a few fired at the siege towers but failed to penetrate their armoured forms.

The Chief sighed internally. He grabbed a bunch of pitch-soaked bolts and loaded one into his crossbow, set it alight in a nearby brazier, and fired at the nearest towers' supports.

The bolt struck true, sinking into the unprotected wood, but failed to set anything on fire or cause any actual harm. But that wasn't a problem. He loaded another bolt in and fired, and beside him Yasuo copied his actions.

Thresh also attacked, and in doing so he managed to surprise the Chief again. After winding his scythe he threw it out incredibly,

impossibly far, cutting a grove into the siege tower before retreating back again. The open wound in the tower began to smolder with ghostly green fire.

The enemy siege tower, perhaps recognizing the threat blue team posed to their advance, focused their plasma cannons on them and began to spit out white-hot energy.

The first salvo was badly aimed and only managed to kill a couple of Noxian archer's, leaving blue team relatively unharmed. Using the brief gap between salvos, the Chief turned to Yasuo and told him to be ready.

Yasuo thankfully understood the Chief's request, and as the next salvo raced towards them the Ronin flourished his arm and cried out a grunt " or perhaps an arcane word " and a wall of wind appeared. Well, sort of a wall of wind. It was covered in a layer of hexagonal orange energy, all summoned from his advanced battle armour.

Regardless, it was more than effective at blocking the energy rounds. They simply disappeared into the energy-covered wall, but it still allowed the bolts and scythe of the team to pass through unhindered.

The tower collapsed after two more volleys, the integral supports catching fire. The structure crushed a half-dozen rangers under it, and the smoke rising from the fast-burning structure served to obscure the sight of the mechanical foe.

The Noxians on the walls seemed to quickly get the message and focused their fire, along with blue team, at the second of the two towers. It fell under the combined fire faster than the first, adding a second pile of debris and more smoke to the battlefield.

The peace didn't last long. Almost immediately after a rumbling started, reminiscent of the one from earlier. The Chief had to look around to find the source.

"Chief? Over here!" Riven shouted, looking down over the ramparts, towards the inner side of the southern gate.

The ground just below was starting to crack, and something was forcing its way upwards. The soldiers around the gates started moving backwards, unsure of what was trying to push it's way upwards.

"Archers," the Chief said again, and this time everyone that could hear him looked to him. "I want two squads to provide heavy suppressive fire in that location."

He called out to the spearmen on the ground. "Hold position! Lock ranks! A squad of rangers is going to come out, and we cannot allow them to gain any ground!"

The soldiers immediately stepped into line with each other and brought their shields together, forming a strong wall. The drill transport rose up and the side opened, disgorging a squad of rangers. They ran out, but instead of finding disorganized troops they found a wall of shields.

They floundered for a moment before starting their charge, but by then the archers had pene fire, cutting down the majority of their number before they reached the spearmen. The Chief's crossbow accounted for three of the dead.

"How do they keep getting under us?" Chief asked Cortana.

"Probably from the catacombs beneath the city," she explained. "They could easily have infiltrated those and positioned these around the city."

The Chief hummed in affirmation, killing the remaining mech with a well-placed bolt.

"Chief?!"

The Chief turned. Graves was one the ground, a large zealot-pattern mech standing above him, its sword raised high.

The Chief tossed his crossbow down and ran towards it, and the zealot, seeing the Chief, switched the path of the sword so that it would hit the Spartan.

Chief twisted around, and the blade passed right by him. He swept his foot out and the automaton fell over, and the Chief slammed both his hands down upon its chest, killing it. He quickly tossed the heavy corpse over the edge.

Another zealot jumped onto the ramparts several meters away from the Chief and began to slice at the nearby archers, killing them with every swipe of its sword.

Yasuo quickly fired at it, but the bolts of his crossbow simply rebounded off the thicker armour of the zealot.

"Aim for the midsection," Cortana called out to Yasuo. "It should slow it down."

Yasuo did just that, and was rewarded when the bolt pierced the thinner armour.

The Chief glanced over the edge, trying to see what was letting the mechs up. At the bottom were many more of the zealots, and each one was using some sort of boxy device that shot out beams of energy, allowing their users to climb the walls.

"Archers, fire at the beams," the Chief called out, hoping some would be able to obey his commands. He wasn't entirely sure if the bolts and arrows would do anything, but he was gambling on them interfering with the solidity of the energy rope.

"Chief, six o'clock," Cortana called out. The Chief turned quickly and saw a zealot charging towards him, so he decided to do the easy thing: charge it back. The zealot tried to swing out with its weapon, but the Chief knocked it aside with his forearm, allowing his shields to take the brunt of the blow. He continued with a shoulder barge, knocking back his opponent a few steps before following up by grabbing its head and pulling.

The zealot tried to respond by punching the Chief, but it was not enough to stop the super soldier from tearing its head off, bringing its motions to an abrupt stop.

_Kolminye, _the Chief thought, _I need a half-company of soldiers at the southern gathouse. It is dangerously close to falling._

The Chief picked up his fallen crossbow and resumed firing, trying to slow down the zealots.

He really wished he had more effective weaponry.

_Where do you expect me to get these troops from? _She responded, sounding annoyed.

Please, High Councilor.

â€|_I'll see what I can scrounge up._

The Chief reloaded his crossbow. It was clear to see that they were nearing the end of their forces. If they were not able to link up with the generals soon, or find the leaders of this war, then things would go very bad.

He considered asking Kolminye if there was any way they could let the Demacian army into the city. That could be a game chang-

"Chief!"

The Spartan was too slow to obey Cortana for once. The large stone, flung from some siege weapon, smashed into the wall beneath the Chief. The section of wall crumbled, and the Chief began to slide with the rubble. He tried to grab onto something; anything, but only succeeded in grabbing more falling rubble.

Alerted by Cortana's warning, Riven rushed to the edge and grabbed the Chief's flailing arm. She grabbed it only barely, but the Chief's weight was pulling her down too.

Yasuo rushed right after the two falling blue team members, grabbing Riven by the waist as he tried to prevent her from falling after the Chief.

The Chief, for his part, was not about to let the three of them fall to their deaths. He punched the weakened wall, making just enough of a dent for his hand to grab on to.

The last few stones tumbled down, and the three of them stayed in their position on the wall: one green armoured giant, suspended in the air, one white haired woman, half off the edge of the wall, and one armoured soldier, grabbing hold of the woman.

"Despite the great amount of joy I find in this position," Yasuo said sarcastically, "can we please move back?"

"Bite me," Riven hissed towards the Ionian.

The Chief grunted and began to rise, using his free hand and feet to climb while Riven pulled from above.

Bullets began to fire in their general direction a few hitting the Chief's near-depleted shields, draining them further.

With one final heave the Chief rose up over the edge of the wall, on solid ground again.

"Damn," Riven said, staring at the gap in the wall.

"Why are our heavy weapons not firing in return?" the Chief asked aloud. A group of Noxian soldiers, a lieutenant among them, moved towards the Chief.

"There has been a sixty-four percent drop in the amount of heavy fire coming from our side," Cortana noted. "There is a high probability that our heavy weapons are being targeted."

The Chief rose up as the soldiers drew near, but made sure he was within cover of the battlements.

"Sir," the lieutenant said, "I am first lieutenant Mobley. We've lost contact with the mounted weapons further back, and we are unsure of how to proceed."

"Well, that's an interesting coincidence," Yasuo said.

The Chief shook his head. "Alright. Riven, you're in full command here; do not let them capture this gatehouse. The rest of blue team and I will go and see what's happening to the ehavy weapons."

"Wait, what?" Riven asked, confused.

"You're in command here," the Chief repeated.

"â€|heh, like I would allow my forces to be under the command of a traitor," Mobley said.

"You have a problem?" Yasuo asked. "She's better than all of you combined. I'd warrant you couldn't even keep up with her in battle."

Mobley frowned.

"Yasuo?" Riven asked, still confused.

"Enough of this," the Chief stated. "Riven, you are in command, no matter what. Blue team, follow me."

* * *

><p>The heavy weapons had indeed been overrun.<p>

They were stationed along a section of fortified wall, wide enough to accommodate an entire battery of catapults. Each one was loaded with some arcane and sickly-looking bombs, and the frames of the weapons were festooned with spikes.

Most of the soldiers that had been there had been cut down, with the remaining crew having fallen back to a nearby bastion. It had taken blue team the better part of ten minutes to clear out the area, which

had been swarming with rangers and zealots.

Three of the drill-transporters seemed to have surfaced near the battery, and the Chief was certain this would pose a serious problem.

_Chief? _The boy's voice, Reighlen's voice, echoed through his head.
Chief, I'm in the city, but I need help.

_What wrong? _The Chief replied. The boy was in the city; that was good. He could use his personal weapons.

Uh... well, I'm trapped, and there are bad things coming out of the ground. I'm at... Uh... the Menge plaza?

_On my way, _Chief responded, unsure of what 'bad things' signified, but sure the 'things coming out of the ground' were drill-transporters. At least he knew where the Menge plaza was; he had noted it on the way to the palace.

He gestured for blue team to follow him. "We're getting our weapons now."

"'Bout time," Graves said. He was thumbing his lighter, since he had finished his cigars a while ago.

_Kolminye, _Chief thought.

What? Whatwhatwhat what?

â€¦_I need a replacement crew for the southern catapult batteries, _he thought to her. _And a squad to guard them._

_Fine, fine. _She sent back. _General Darius has just gotten some other general back into line; we now have more troops to actually order around. Sadly, still no chain of command._

_Understood. _The Chief replied, running along the streets with his team. _Update me when the situation changes._

He did not get an answer from her, but that was to be expected. She was sure to be up to her neck in work, trying to organize an effective defense of the city.

While the Chief had said he would be in charge, he was more just organizing than commanding. The High Councilor fit that role far better than he, and he knew it. It was far more effective this way.

A bright beam of light pierced through the building on the right, and the energy instantly drained the Chief's shields. Years of training took over and he rolled to cover, hiding himself from the beam.

"Seems like a jackal-pattern mech," Cortana said. "Less than twenty meters out, angle of elevation is thirty-two degrees."

"Yasuo, wall," Chief said, absorbing the information Cortana gave him.

Yasuo summoned his wall in front of the hole in the wall, and the Chief quickly took cover behind it. He aimed with his crossbow at the location Cortana had said, and took the shot as soon as the jackals head crossed within his line of sight.

The jackals armour was weaker than a standard automaton, so the bolt pierced it right through, dropping it dead.

The Chief gave the generic 'move forwards' hand gesture and moved through the building, reloading.

They emerged on the other side, and noted they were just above the plaza. Several more jackal patterns were around, firing at the small group of soldiers and the cart. The majority of the mechs in the area were rangers, however, and there were a great many of them. The only thing that seemed to be stopping them from being overrun was the hulking form of tibbers, who was tearing up anything that came close.

The Chief jumped down, landing on one of the jackals. It was crushed instantly under his weight, so he was free to focus his attention on the other one. It only took one shot for him to take it down.

Yasuo fired too, as did Graves. Yasuo's bolt took down another mech, while Graves arrows did little more than slow it down.

The mech was finally taken down by a concentrated blast of fire, which melted right through its carapace.

The Chief nodded towards Annie, who was standing in the cart and giggling, before resuming his offensive.

He dropped his crossbow and drew his Noxian sword, slicing through two of the rangers in quick succession.

Yasuo followed the Chief's action and drew his own blade. With a flourish he summoned a tornado of wind, and threw it towards the grouped automatons. They were knocked aside like ragdolls, making them easy pickings for Graves and Thresh.

A ranger came up from behind the Chief, but he stabbed his sword through it before tossing it aside. The mech exploded, its generator having been pierced, and it took down another two rangers.

Everything went silent as the area was finally cleared of enemies.

The Chief moved towards his assistant, tossing his sword aside.

"Thanks," the boy practically sobbed.

"Don't mention it," Cortana said happily, while the Chief just grunted out, "weapons."

Annie nodded almost frantically while she tossed the trap covering the cart aside, revealing the weapons of blue team.

"Nice," Graves grinned, picking up his shotgun. "Real nice."

The Chief grabbed his assault rifle, loading a magazine into it. With a resounded click it slid home. He continued stacking up on weapons, sheathing his blade by his waist and grabbing his pistol. For good measure he also picked up the Spartan laser, though he had no intention of actually using it.

"Weapons for the heroes!" Annie cried out, apparently enjoying the sight of blue team rearming.

_Chief? _Kolminye sent.

Something wrong?

_The east gateâ€¦ it's fallen, _she said. _The enemy has gained entrance to the city. _

The Chief paused for a second. That was really not good. _We need reinforcements. We need to get the Demacian army in here._

_The only way we can do that is if someone of actual authority does that, _she explained. _They might be willing to put up with us to win, but they'll kill any Demacians that come in here._

The Chief didn't know how to respond. He was at a loss of what to do.

_Waitâ€¦ _ Kolminye started. _General Darius is going to hold them off. If you can convince himâ€¦ _

_It will be done, _the Chief said. _Try and re-position troops to the streets leading to that gate, we can halt them before they get too far._

Sure, sure.

"Alright," the Master Chief said out loud. "Team, we're going to the eastern gatehouse."

"â€¦Another gatehouse?" Thresh asked, genuinely sounding annoyed. But then, e was always annoyed.

"Great. Just great," Yasuo complained.

"Almighty then," Cortana cried out. "Time to rock and roll."

* * *

><p>Work. Power outages. Sometimes it feels like something doesn't want me writing this story.

Anyways, hope you guys enjoy the chapter. Things start a little more slowly in this chapter, but that's because it's only the opening stages of battle, so I hope you guys can put up with that.

C ya (hopefully) soon.

Chapter 39: They'll Regret That, Too

Siege of Noxus, Part 2

The red sword hit the Master Chief's raised forearm, breaking the already heavily drained energy shielding with an audible crack. The blade traveled the small distance remaining to the Chief's arm, but the shield had sufficiently stopped enough of the force behind the blow to render it harmless. Except for the paint it scratched off.

The Chief spun away from the blow, taking aim with his assault rifle and pumping half a clip into the armoured chest of the zealot-pattern mech. The first few bullets sparked off the armour before penetrating and tearing it open.

Satisfied that the zealot was out of commission, the Chief turned his attention to two jackal-pattern mechs which were firing into the swirling melee around the east gate.

One burst from his rifle was enough to take down the first of the jackal pair, but the second quickly hopped to the side and focused on the Chief once its companion died.

The Chief rolled to the right as the jackal fired, the beam of energy piercing the ground where the Chief had just been.

Chief fired another burst from his rifle, but the shots were slightly off-center and ripped off one off its gun arm.

The jackal tried to back off, and the Chief ran after it. As soon as the jackal was within range he killed it with a single blow from the butte of his rifle.

The Chief calmly reloaded his rifle, saving the magazine for a later date, just in case he was able to recreate assault rifle rounds. His shields began to recharge, the meter in his HUD inching its way back up to full.

The battle around the eastern gate was raging fiercely. The entire sub-district was engulfed in battle, Noxian soldiers fighting against their mechanical counterparts. The buildings were slowly being broken down into rubble, and half the battle was navigating the debris-filled streets.

A nearby Noxian sergeant cried out in pain as a pair of rangers jumped on him, slicing him apart with their energy blades.

The Chief took aim and cut the pair down, but the sergeant was already dead by the time he did so.

"Chief," Cortana spoke over the internal comm, "One squad of mechs, moving along the third road, grid three-by-one."

The Chief processed the information highlighted by the map Cortana brought up. The enemy was pushing forwards steadily. There seemed to be no end to their reinforcements, and the Noxians were just getting swept aside by the might of the automatons.

Hopefully general Darius was still alive.

"Yasuo," the Chief said, opening a comm channel to the wanderer.

"Sup, Chief," Yasuo said cheerfully, completely at odds with his current actions.

"Yasuo, move to street on grid three-by-one. There are enemy reinforcements there/"

"Iâ€|don't know where that is."

Cortana cut in this time. "Seriously, I just sent you the map. Look at the picture."

"I don't know how to work this thing!" Yasuo shouted.

"â€|He's useless," Cortana concluded, closing the channel. "Let's hope he can accomplish his objective."

"He can handle it," Chief stated, firing another burst from his AR. The rangers were climbing over the rubble of a blacksmith's, firing down on the Noxian soldiers assembled in the area.

"Noxians!" the Chief shouted, his voice easily carrying over the din of the battle. "You need to charge them!"

The Noxians did not listen, as was to be expected. They were under the command of general Darius, and so would not listen to some stranger in their midst.

Nevertheless, the Chief had already planned for this. The Noxians, as proven before, respected strength. He could certainly make a show of that.

"You will not survive a full volley from them," Cortana said, easily predicting the Chief's actions. "If you charge, you need to present the smallest area possible and focused your shields over one area."

"Acknowledged," the Chief said. He had already knew most of what Cortana just said, but it was always helpful to have accurate information.

He charged the rangers himself, firing his assault rifle while presenting his shoulder to the enemy.

High-energy rounds impacted against his shields, draining them by a small amount each hit. The Chief's assault rifle barked out in response, cutting down two of the mechs before he was among them.

The nearest automaton swung its arm towards him, but the Chief grabbed said arm and crushed it. It tried to dodge back, but he followed up with a punch to the midsection, ripping out its vital components.

Two of the rangers crouched down to deliver a volley into the Chief's shields while a third rushed towards him from the right, attempting to force the Chief back down the pile of rubble.

The Chief ducked the blow from the mech and repositioned himself so he was in between the mech and the two crouching rangers.

The rangers opened fire, and the ranger in front of the Chief was cut down.

The Chief used the distraction to headshot each one of the firing rangers, ending their existence.

The other rangers turned to face the Chief, knowing him to be the greatest threat, but by then it was too late.

The Noxian soldiers charged up the rubble, fury in their hearts and in their faces. The rangers, too immersed in their current action to do anything about the charging Noxian, were hacked apart by their wickedly curved blades.

One persistent ranger tried to stab the Chief with its arm mounted blade, but instead found itself impaled upon three Noxian swords. The swords did not seem to hit any vital spots, so the mech continued to claw at the Chief until it was put down by a final sword.

"We need to move to the main gate," Cortana said. "It's getting way to hectic over here."

As if in response to the A.I.'s words, two squads of mechs charged through another ruined building on the other side of the street.

"That seems like a good idea," the Chief noted, firing his assault rifle in bursts.

The Noxian's charged down again, attempting to close in and stop the enemy from bringing their ranged weapons to bear â€" or at least, that was what the Chief hoped they were doing. It was either that, or the Noxian's were downright suicidal.

The Chief edged away from the combat, turning down the main street that led towards the eastern gate.

"Graves, Thresh, where are you?" the Chief asked, trying to communicate with the comm devices that had been supplied to his team by Heimerdinger. "Report in."

Graves was the one who responded. "We're, ah," his voice was momentarily muffled by the booming sound of his shotgun, "Well, we're in thisâ€¦ plaza? Or something."

"Change of plans. Meet me at the eastern gatehouse."

"That might be a little â€" another shot â€" ah, forget it. We'll be right there."

"Acknowledged," the Chief said. "Cortana, tell Yasuo to meet us there also."

"Sure thing," she replied. "Let's hope he can understand that."

The combat was thicker on the main street, since it was the place

where all the automatons were entering from. The Noxian soldiers were fighting against the numerically " and probably physically " superior foe, and yet they were holding their own. Noxian spearmen " who were in the majority here " fought in clusters, using their spears to run through anything that got near. Archers and crossbowmen maintained ranged superiority, but only for the time being. The mechs would soon change their tactics up, once they realized the gate was not falling as fast as it should have.

The Chief stopped to fire his rifle on full auto, shredding a zealot mech that was about to lop off the head of a spearman.

He moved forwards slower, finding targets he deemed to be of high-priority and taking them down with well-placed shots.

A ranger punched its arm blade through the neck of an archer and turned towards the Chief, the gun mounted on its other arm spitting bullets.

The Chief, not wishing to dodge and allow the rounds to hit Noxians behind him, stood firm and allowed the shots to be intercepted by his shield. A return burst of fire was enough to take the target down.

Another pair of mechs pushed past a group of spearmen and ran towards the Chief, firing as they ran.

"Look at them run after you," Cortana said singsong-like. "It's almost like they love you."

The Chief hummed in response, killing them both with headshots. He calmly reloaded his rifle as moved forwards again.

A boulder smashed into a structure nearby, explosively sending dust and debris outwards. Small pebbles and rocks hit the Spartans energy shielding, causing little damage, but Noxians nearby were not so lucky.

"The catapults are still up," the Chief noted.

"Obviously," Cortana replied. "Did you think we could destroy them, somehow?"

The Chief decided not to respond, focusing instead on dispatching the three rangers that tried to jump him.

A group of swordsmen just ahead of the Spartan were all cut down in an instant by bright beams of energy. A three man squad of jackals stepped through the bodies, searching with their rifles. Almost simultaneously, the three mechs aimed at the Chief.

In the exact same span of breath, the Chief aimed at them. His finger tightened on the trigger.

Smoke erupted across the street, thick black clouds obscuring sight. The three snipers began to waver as their targeting systems lost focus.

The Chief suffered from no such penalty, and opened fire as a wave of buckshot ripped through cloud.

The three jackals fell, and number of glowing lights within the fog also dropped.

The Chief paced forwards, along with Noxian spearmen who tried to gain some sort of better positioning.

The clouds dispersed as suddenly as they appeared, revealing a line of dead automatons, as well as Graves and Thresh.

There were still plenty of remaining rangers, and they began to pour fire towards the other end of the street. They were inaccurate, but the weight of fire was so great it didn't actually matter.

Thresh had dropped his lantern, provide a shield for Graves, who was simply firing into the automaton lines. He wasn't making much of an impact, though.

The Chief ran up beside the pair, taking down two rangers with full-auto fire from his rifle. "Another smoke," Chief said.

"Sorry bud, all outta smokes," Graves replied.

"He means a smoke grenade," Cortana clarified, "not a cigar."

"Oh," said Graves, grabbing another of the balls attached to his side. "Coulda just said that."

The smoke grenade detonated, and black smoke poured out across the street for the second time. The mech fire subsided, their targeting systems obviously not calibrated for that kind of environment.

"So, what do we do now?" Thresh asked, retreating backwards.

Suddenly, a massive tornado ripped across the street, pulling debris and bodies along in its wake. It tore through the smoke cloud, revealing the ranger lines. They did not last long as the tornado passed through them, obliterating the center of the formation in an instant.

Chief looked behind him and saw Yasuo running, blade held low, armour plates clanking against each other. He ran right past the trio, diving right into enemy lines.

"That guy has some serious issues," Graves noted, resuming his attack on enemy forces.

"â€|Noted," the Chief said. He also resumed firing, trying to take down any zealots and jackals that were in the crowd. "Thresh, go in and give him cover."

Thresh waded into combat, hooking an enemy and puling himself in. Yasuo swept from enemy to enemy, cutting them down with swift strokes. Noxian soldiers charged in also, taking own the automatons with a fierceness that was surprising.

The Chief walked forwards slowly, still firing. Graves matched him, step for step, his powerful gun blowing holes into any enemy within

range.

"The path to the gatehouse is open," Cortana said. "We should get there fast. You know. Army and all that."

"Right," said Chief. "Yasuo, start moving to the gate. Use a wind to block off the enemy."

"Got it," Yasuo confirmed. He dashed through enemies on an obvious path to the gate, putting up walls of wind wherever the enemy was shooting too intensely.

The Chief sped up, firing single pin-point shots to take down rangers that stepped in their path. Graves was less subtle, firing buckshots at every cluster of enemies they passed.

They broke through the final line of automatons at the end of the street and continued on into the gatehouse plaza. The walls of the fortress like structure rose above them, and battle was raging fiercely everywhere.

"Where is the general?" Thresh inquired, his head turning and searching.

"I don't kn-"

A massive explosion cut the Chief off. It ripped through the ground violently, creating a meter deep fissure that separated the four man group.

"Well I can't really say that was unexpected," Cortana said slowly.

The two automatons were very large, roughly the size of a rift golem: easily twice the height of the Spartan, possibly more. Each one bore a frighteningly similar resemblance to a covenant hunter, with bulky cannons covering their right arms and massive shields on their right. Instead of spines on their back they had two pairs of what appeared to be exhaust pipes, and energy crackled around them periodically.

"This has to be a joke, right?" Graves muttered.

A beam of pure energy slammed into a hastily summoned wind wall, and the raw power of it was dissipating the wind as fast as it could be summoned.

"Better start believing it," Yasuo struggled to say.

The second of the pair stalked menacingly towards the other three, its main weapon cycling.

Graves raised his shotgun and fired three times, each shot rebounding off the thing's armour.

"So run?" Graves offered.

The Chief nodded, diving to the left as the arm cannon fired.

The high-powered beam followed the Chief, burning lines into the

ground, but it did not actually reach the Chief.

The Spartan quickly primed a plasma grenade and threw it, and was satisfied when he saw it latch onto the hunter's center chest plate. It exploded after a few seconds, to no visible effect.

"This might be a problem," Cortana said.

"Weak points?" the Chief asked, firing his rifle in short bursts to try and find some gap in its armour.

"Uhmâ€¦ maybe those things on its back? Really, I have no idea."

"Graves, Thresh," the Chief called out, "Distract it."

"Fine, fine," came the outlaws reply.

Thresh hooked the beast and reeled himself in, slashing his scythe against the hunter to no avail.

The beast responded by slamming its shield downwards, slamming into the ghostly body of Thresh.

"Bastard," Graves hissed as he fired repeatedly at the automaton. The hunter shrugged off the shots and turned to the Chief, who was trying to run around it.

It raised its arm canon.

"Graves, fire," the Chief shouted.

Graves opened the revolving cartridge and quickly inserted one of his HE rounds before quickly slamming it shut and pumping. He fired, the force of the shot kicking against his shoulder almost painfully.

The hunter experienced worse pain, if automatons even did, as the HE round detonated against its backside. Sparks of electricity began to fly as the creature tried to straighten its partially destroyed backside.

"It's still not down?" Thresh asked, heaving. The shield had cut into him deeply, but his spectral form was repairing itself at an almost frightening rate.

The Chief assumed it was because he was already dead.

The Chief raised his assault rifle and tried to fire, but the hunter redirected the sparks surrounding its body and blocked all the incoming shots.

"What the hell?" Graves shouted. "It's got one of those low health shields, like on the rift!"

"â€¦This is seriously unreal," Cortana said.

Chief glanced over to Yasuo, who was busy dashing around the second hunter.

"Thresh," the Chief ordered as he simultaneously commed Yasuo, "flay

that mech towards Yasuo."

Thresh moved to obey, unafraid of the towering mech, while Yasuo just shouted "why?!" over the link.

"Be ready," was all the Chief had to say as he continued to fire.

Thresh flayed the hunter, knocking it back a short distance.

"Now I get it," Yasuo exclaimed. He dashed towards the upraised target, sweeping it further upwards with a strong gust of wind. At its apex Yasuo charged up his blade, watching it glow with a yellow internal light, and sliced downwards.

The blade bit deep and cut through several layers of armour. The hunter tried to punch out with its shield arm, but Yasuo allowed the wind to push towards the ground, slamming the automaton against it with lethal force.

The automaton was crushed into the stone ground, pieces of its body lying around everywhere. A quick scan confirmed that it lacked any sort of electrical signs that the Chief associated with live mechs.

Yasuo glided down, landing softly beside the Chief. "Welp, that takes care of one," he said.

The other stared at the group for a long second. It raised its arm cannon, the weapon rotating as it glowed brighter.

The Chief and Graves both fired upon the hunter-pattern mech, but the Hunter simply raised its shield and deflected the shots.

"This is going to be brutal," Cortana added in as the barrel glowed brighter.

Suddenly the Hunter stumbled backwards, as if pulled by something. It raised its head, trying to stretch it backwards to see what was causing its aim to be thrown off.

It was able to see a figure jump high above it, a massive axe raised, before it slammed right down and cleaved the automaton in two.

"That was surprisingly easy," Cortana said.

The Chief reloaded his assault rifle, walking up to the newcomer.

"General Darius," he said, respectfully inclining his head.

General Darius huffed.

"General, I need you to allow the Demacian army into Noxus," the Chief said, getting straight to the point.

Darius gave him an incredulous look.

"That wasn't a joke," Cortana quipped.

"You should know I cannot very well allow that," Darius responded, shifting his axe around impatiently.

"This city will not survive if you do not," the Chief replied. Bullets impacted around them all, but the area seemed to be untouched compared to the rest of the battlefield.

Darius stared for a few moments. "That much is true," he admitted at last. "But Demacians will find no place here."

"But that's â€" the Chief began, before he was interrupted by the voice of High Councilor Kolminye.

Master Chief, we have a problem. Mech forces are deploying those underground transports en masse, and we can't mobilize fast enough to prevent them from gaining ground.

The Chief hesitated for a second. "How are so many beneath us?"

I don't know.

"â€|Can you give me a readout of their locations?"

What's a readout?

"Who is he talking to?" Darius asked Graves in the background.

"The High Councilor," Graves replied. He was shooting at mechs along the walls, trying to thin out the horde. "Yasuo, Thresh, let's set up a perimeter around the Chief."

"Locations," the Chief clarified to Kolminye.

Ah. We have reports stretching all the way from sections â€" how do I read this thing â€" C-two to D-four, H-five to I-two, M-one to N-sevenâ€|

As the Chief listened to Kolminye list of locations, he began to formulate a theory. "Cortana, can you bring up a map of previous locations those things popped up?"

"Right here," Cortana said. She opened up a map of Noxus on the side of the Chief's HUD, highlighted with locations of encountered drill transports.

"Overlay that with our new information."

A swathe of new dots appeared on the map.

"Want me to estimate future emergence locations based on current data?" Cortana offered.

"Yes," the Chief replied instantly.

_What's going on, Chief? _Kolminye inquired.

New dots appeared, and a pattern solidified on the map.

"It's like a spiral," Cortana said. It was true. The dots all assembled like a five-armed spiral, covering the majority of the

city.

"It's all centered here," the Chief said, highlighting the center spiral with an eye blink.

"All centered where now?" Yasuo asked, not following the conversation very well.

"That's block F-three," Cortana supplied.

The Chief focused his attention back on Darius. "What is in block F-three?"

"Blockâ€¦ nothing," he said abruptly. "Nothing is there."

"Something is there," Cortana said aloud. "And our enemy is after it."

Seriously, what's going on? Is it important?

"I'm going there now," the Chief told Darius, "and whatever I find, I will prevent it from falling into enemy hands â€" however I must. I will also give the go ahead for Demacian forces to enter the city, since the siege itself is obviously a rouse for whatever the enemy is trying to find. We need all the help we can get if there targets are inside."

The Chief turned away.

"It is not in the block itself," Darius said suddenly.

The Chief turned back.

"It is in the catacombs beneath the block. It is a sort of vault, if you will. Other than that, I cannot sayâ€¦ for I do not know," he continued. "I will allow your soldiers to enter the city, but don't expect a warm welcome."

"I know," the Chief said. "But we need them."

"Chief, maybe we should stay here," Yasuo said. "I don't think this gate will last much longer."

"That'sâ€¦ the most coherent thing I've heard him say so far," Cortana said thoughtfully.

"Whoa, watch it," Yasuo warned.

There was an explosion along the walls as a trio of boulders smashed into them, sending Noxian archers flying.

"Get going," Darius grunted.

The Chief nodded, before turning away. _Councilor, _he sent, _Demacians are allowed to enter the city. Coordinate them as best you can. Additionally, send troops to block F-three- both Demacians and Noxians, preferably. Treat it as the enemy command post._

Why? What's there?

Kolminye's voice was almost eager in the Chief's mind. Too eager.

I don't know. Have Garen and Xin take command of Demacian forces. Send Lux and...

For a moment he forgot the name of the other champion that had accompanied them. That wasn't good; he usually remembered these things quickly. Hopefully it was just battle stress.

â€| _and Olaf to that block with the reinforcements._

You will tell me what this is about later, yes?

Yes, the Chief replied, seriously hoping there would be a later.

* * *

><p>"I think it is safe to say," Cortana said as a beam of intense energy ripped through the cover the Chief was hiding behind not a moment before, "that the enemy is, indeed, looking for something here."<p>

"You don't say," the Chief quipped back, firing a long burst from his rifle.

They were in something like a warehouse, and even that was a vague description for the building. All the Chief really knew was that there was an entrance to the underground here, and that was all that was important.

Noxian soldiers were somewhat scarce in this area, mostly because they had already been thinned out by the underground mech units. Reinforcements also had yet to arrive, but that was presumably because the Demacians were much further off and the Noxians were less than organized. The Chief had been forced to fight his way through, but a hunter pair had been guarding this particular building. He had managed to disable one with three of his plasma grenades and two clips of ammo, but the other remained. And it seemed to be angry.

The hunter's beam cannon fired again, forcing the Chief to dodge once again, this time hiding behind a pillar-like structure.

"Do you think the Noxian High Command would mind if the building gets destroyed?" the Chief asked his companion.

"I dunno. Maybe. Why?"

"I have an idea," the Chief said, using his visor to highlight the pillar he was using as cover. The pillar glowed a bright blue, as did a system of cross-beams on the ceiling and floor.

"That is a terrible idea," Cortana stated.

"â€|It's the fastest way?" the Chief offered. He really didn't need an annoyed Cortana in his head right now.

"It's crazy," Cortana said again.

"Then you can stay here," Chief said simply, the sound of the

charging sound of the hunter's cannon reaching his ears.

"Fortunately for us bo-â€| actually, you already know what I'm going to say."

The Chief nodded as he rolled out of cover, running towards the hunter.

The beam fired less than a second later, the targeting systems already too locked on to the pillar for it to change targets. It skimmed by the Spartan and ripped through the reinforced pillar, causing the entire building to shake.

The building continued to shake as the mechanical hunter turned to face the new threat. It brought its shield forwards, ready to slam away the human running towards it.

The Chief, at the last second, jumped. Using the hunter's shield as a springboard, he launched himself up into the air above the mech.

And it was just in time, too. The ceiling around the pillar gave way, crashing into the floor of the warehouse. Because the building was positioned above an underground entrance, the floor had nothing to reinforce it â€" so when the roof crashed into it, the floor began to cave in.

That meant that the ground beneath the hunter also gave in, and the creature flipped over as it began to fall.

The Chief used gravity to fall towards the falling hunter, firing down with his assault rifle. The creature could not block the bullets due to its compromising position, and the rounds took off chunks of its armour.

The mech gave a garbled, electronic roar as it fell, the Chief falling along with it. The Spartan continued to fire the entire way down, hitting weak points along its armoured torso.

They finally fell into a cavern-like structure after a full minute of falling. The hunter hit the ground first, and it immediately tried to stand, but the Chief landed on its severely weakened chest. The life was instantly crushed out of it.

"Now that we're hereâ€|," Cortana began.

"We search," was the Master Chief's reply.

* * *

><p>"Are we seriously going to be fighting alongside the Noxians?" the Demacian company champion, Settar, asked.<p>

"Yes," Garen, might of Demacian, replied, sending a sidelong glance towards their 'allies'. He couldn't say he fully trusted them, but they needed each other's help for this. He had been ordered to subjugate this area, and that was what he was going to do. It would be a serious task, seeing as how the enemy was incredibly well-entrenched, but he would do it.

To make matters worse, however, was the fact that the Master Chief was also somewhere here. According to the High Councilor, he was supposed to be somewhere around the entrance to the Noxian underground, yet all he had found was a massive hole in the ground, presumably where the entrance was supposed to be.

Not very good.

"Contact!" a soldier shouted. Garen had just enough time to look up at the soldier, high on the roof of a building, before that man was speared through by a thin beam of light.

Garen grimaced. "Seventh and Third squads, move out to the right. Keep your lines thick. Fourth, stretch out wide on the left and draw them in so Fifth squad can gank them."

"And me, brother?" Lux asked, seemingly out of nowhere.

"Ranged support," Garen replied instantly, "from one of those buildings there." While Garen was sure some families might abhor the idea of a daughter fighting, especially when it was their sibling telling them to do so, his family did not. It was their pride to fight for the glory of Demacia, and no one was more effective than his sister.

"I want archers formed up in three blocks, firing staggered volleys," Garen continued. "Go." The messengers lined up beside him all took off, repeating his orders to the battle company.

"Wait," he called out, stopping one of the messengers.

"Sir?"

"The Noxian commander, tell him what we are planning on doing but do not tell him our force disposition. Understood?" Garen made sure to look the messenger in the eye.

"Yes, sir."

Garen nodded curtly and sent the man off. Hopefully, the Noxian leader would play nice and synchronize with their battle force. If not, then this would be a lot harder than it needed to be.

A soldier in heavy vanguard armour walked up to Garen, saluting. "Sir, still no sign of the Master Chief, sir."

"Thank you," Settar replied in Garen's place. "Get a few minute's rest and rejoin the battle line."

The soldier saluted one more time before backing off.

Garen turned to look at the champion. "Do you thi " "

He was cut short as an intense rumbling began. Garen staggered back as the ground beneath his feet shifted, and something massive poked its way through.

He backed off further, as did Settar. The object that pushed its way out was large, bulky, and rather intimidating.

It was still for a moment, but only for a moment.

The side unfolded, and Garen locked eyes â€" or whatever it was that mechs had â€" with the squad of zealots lying inside.

"Demacians!" He shouted as the zealots unfolded themselves from their transport, "break their ranks!"

He spun towards the zealots, hopelessly outnumbered but still with a smile on his face.

* * *

><p>Eh... Hi? Hope everyone enjoyed the chapter. I really do. Still not sure if this story is even good or not...

The other half of this chapter is already done (minus a finishing paragraph), I just split it in half for ease.

And... well, I have to give Coudos to TheEliteDucky for guessing there would be hunter mechs. Who saw that one coming, huh?

...

40. Chapter 40

Chapter 40: You Break It, You Buy It.

Siege of Noxus, part 3

The zealot-pattern mech lunged forwards, whipping its blade around in a fierce arc.

Garen lashed out with his sword decisively, striking the mech's joint in such a way that left it reeling. He followed up with two sharp jabs with his fist, driving it back further, before cleaving downwards with his blade â€" a kill.

Garen did not have time to enjoy his kill. The zealots were pressing all around, engaging his squad in a swirling melee. He needed to end this quickly.

He began to spin with his blade, cutting at the zealots closest to him. Electricity sparked off of the edge, hitting and scorching enemies with the bolts. Champion Settar, who was nearby, used Garen's renewed assault to cut down a zealot with his axe.

Garen's spin was stopped by a particularly fierce zealot, and was forced onto his back foot as he braced his angular blade against his opponents red one.

Settar shoulder barged the zealot, and at the same time hacked into it with his axe. It bit deep, slicing away layers of armour, but the zealot seemed unaffected. It punched the champion, and pointed its blade to the stumbling man.

Another axe, different from Settar's, flew into the thick melee and

struck the mech in the face.

The automaton fell down flat, the long-bearded axe just lying there, lodged deep in its skull.

A lone, bearded figure entered into the crowd, growling a challenging to the zealots.

Two of the zealots turned to face the newcomer, raising their blades in an almost eerie unison.

The man charged them, and the first mech slashed horizontally with its sword. The man ducked before lashing out with his other axe, smashing it into the automaton four times.

The zealot, not willing to be hit by a human, weaved back and delivered a punch with its free hand. The man took the blow in the face before delivering a particularly reckless swing into creature's chest with enough fury to knock both mech and attacker back a step.

The second zealot thrustured forwards with its sword, and the man parried the sword with his axe.

The wounded mech took the opportunity to sweep its long red blade out, and was rewarded by a line of red on the man's chest.

If the zealot duo were expecting something to come of that, they were sorely disappointed. The man redoubled his attacks, as if the wound made him faster. In an almost berserk rage he tore the already wounded mech apart with swift, viscous strikes of his axe.

The second zealot tried to thrust forwards again, attempting to pin the man down, but he rolled forwards and out of the range of the sword.

He rolled right to where his thrown axe lay, and picked it up, now armed with two weapons again.

The zealot rotated its sword, bringing it in a classic en garde position.

The berserk man did not care. He tossed his axe, ripping through the flexible joint of the mechs left arm, tearing it straight off.

The mech stumbled and the man ran towards it. In an attempt to gain the upper hand, the zealot swung the sword around in a great arc, but the man rolled out of the way and picked up his axe once again.

He threw it once more, this time tearing the sword arm off the zealots body.

The now armless zealot tried to tackle the man, perhaps thinking it could take him down with its considerable weight, but the man raised both his axes high and brought them down with a resounding crash.

Smiling down at his kill, the man wiped his lips in a manner similar to a person that had just feasted.

"That was an interesting fight, berserker," Settar said with a tilt of his head.

"Mnnnngh," was the response he got.

"Olaf," Garen interrupted, cutting through the haze of bloodlust that had descended on the berserkers mind. "Thank you. Are you here to stay?"

"Yes," Olaf growled out, spittle flying from his mouth. He seemed to be on edge, but that was hardly a surprise â€" Olaf was always looking for a challenging fight, and always did so in a state of frenzy.

Garen gestured around with his sword. "Can you clear out the remaining autmatons?"

Olaf didn't nod, or show in any way that he had heard Garen's order. He simply began to fight again as if he had never stopped.

"I don't trust that guy," Settar mumbled, watching Olaf lumber away.

"I can't say I do either," Garen admitted, "But we need the help right now, and he is more than capable."

"Sir!" one of the messengers from earlier ran through a gap in the melee, panting.

"Report," Garen stated curtly.

"Thi â€" third squad has been routed, and seventh is cut off form our â€" "

"Have the sixth move in from behind, standard advance formation. If you can get to seventh, tell them to stay in a cluster-pattern and await help," Garen told the messenger swiftly before turning away.

The messenger, with one final huff, saluted and ran away.

"Where are those damned Noxians?" Settar inquired, anger laced through his voice.

"I don't know," Garen said, readying his electrically-charged broadsword, "but if we don't co-ordinate sometime soon, we are going to die here."

* * *

><p>"We are going to die here," Cortana concluded. "There is no reason why sabotage mechs should be so coordinated."<p>

The Master Chief's only reply was a grunt, for he was far too busy trying to unjam his assault rifle.

"Mech, twelve o'clock," Cortana reported.

The Chief braced himself against his cover as a jackal-pattern mech peered over. Maybe it was unsure of the Spartans location, or maybe

it thought it could get an easy kill, but it did not go as planned.

The Chief sprung up, using his left arm â€" the one that wasn't holding his AR â€" to grab the Jackal in a headlock. With a tensing of his muscles, he crushed its head and let go.

Cortana whistled out loud, an electronic noise echoing through the tunnel. All the remaining mechs turned to the Chief's location.

"Don't do that," the Chief scolded his A.I, finally removing the bullet that was jamming his rifle.

"Sorry," she said half-heartedly as the Chief rose up and began to shoot.

The jackals very quickly fell under the super-soldier's pin-point fire, and the few that managed to snap off shots missed completely.

The rangers in the tunnel quickly turned their bodies, presenting a smaller target to the Chief and his weapon. They began to fire in unison from different directions, forcing the Spartan to duck back into cover.

He clutched his rifle as energy rounds pinged off the stone cover, counting mentally to five.

On five he vaulted over his makeshift cover, grabbing the headless jackal as soon as he cleared it. He moved three steps before hurling the body to the closest pair of rangers, watching in contentment as they went down under its weight. A quick burst to the dead mech's generator was all the Chief needed to take care of the two downed rangers.

He switched his focus to the next pair, who were already trying to switch their fire. It seemed that no matter how fast the Chief reacted, the enemy was already ready to counter him. He assumed it was because of some sort of software in their systems, possibly an analytical probability engine that Cortana has â€" had. Probably.

He took the first down with a concentrated burst of fire, and killed the second one with a fist to the chest. He hurled the volatile body into the three rangers nearest to the back, and watched two of them explode into scrap. The remaining one, disoriented and damaged, tried to continue its assault on the Chief, but was put down by the remaining bullets in the Spartan's magazine.

"Four seconds," Cortana said, sounding less than impressed. "You could have done better."

"If you hadn't alerted all of them, I would have," the Chief snapped back. It really wasn't like Cortana to do things like this, and it was starting to worry him a great deal.

But it really wasn't like he could do anything about it now.

"Where are we going?" Chief asked, easily masking his unease to his companion.

"I just set an objective marker," Cortana replied. At the same moment a blue arrow flashed into life in the Chief's HUD, marking a doorway set into the cavern. "It's a, uhâ€ entranceway to a maintenance tunnel. It'll take you to the vault area indirectly. Maybe we can sneak up on them."

The Chief followed the waypoint, his assault rifle always at the ready.

He peered through the open doorway: clear. He advanced, still alert and ready to react, but the straight and narrow hallway seemed to be devoid of life.

"Advance twenty-one meters," Cortana said professionally. At least she could still act properly when she wanted to.

The Chief moved the specified distance, stopping just before a four way junction.

"Left," Cortana said.

The Chief turned left, scanning with his rifle, and prepared to move through.

"No, wait," Cortana said haltingly. "Right. Go right."

The Chief paused for a moment, waiting to see if Cortana would change her mind again, before turning around and heading in the opposite direction.

He followed Cortana's directions for a while, only doubling back once more. He only stopped once he reached a dead end.

"Huh," Cortana muttered. "I swear this was supposed to be the vault area, but I can't read anything with your suits sensors."

"Understood," the Chief said, stepping back from the wall. He prepped a plasma grenade, the last one he had with him.

"â€ what are you doing?" his partner asked, sounding confused.

"These walls weren't meant to stop plasma," Chief said cryptically. He primed the grenade and tossed it at the wall, watching it stick to the stone. He quickly turned away and moved until he was within a safe distance from the blast.

The plasma grenade detonated with a bright flash, instantly vaporizing several meters of reinforced stone in a powerful pulse of heat.

"That worked rather well," Cortana noted as the hole in the wall revealed another chamber.

The Chief moved through the clean-cut hole in the wall, making sure to avoid the super-heated edges. The room he entered was large, and he appeared to be on some sort of gantry or walkway above the actual usable area.

The sound of the plasma grenade detonating had not gone unnoticed by the current occupants of the room. As soon as the Chief moved in, he came under fire from at least five different sources.

He rolled immediately, but caught off-guard as he was he was unable to stop his shields from bursting.

He crouch-sprinted along the walkway, trying to get into a better position, but stopped when he heard the sound of doors opening. He fired a long burst of suppressive fire over the walkway crenellation as he tried to find what was opening the door. Unfortunately, by the time his eyes alighted on the door, they were already closing again.

"Damn," Cortana swore as the Chief ducked back into cover, "one of them may have gotten out with something."

Chief mag-locked his assault rifle to his back as he drew out his magnum, flipping the safety off. At this distance, it was more reliable to use the powerful pistol than risk missing everything with the inaccurate MA5-series rifle.

He popped over the crenellation once again, looking down the scope of the pistol. He found the head of a ranger fairly quickly and let out four quick shots, putting it down with ease. He switched targets just as quickly as he had found the first, putting it down with the same mechanical precision.

He ducked back into cover as another wave of fire stabbed out towards him. This time, he waited for his shields to recharge before rising up.

There were three rangers left out in the open, so the Chief was quick to put them down with his remaining bullets and jump off the walkway.

One of the rangers seemed to have survived the magnum, which was a testament to how hardy they had been built. He ended its existence with a heavy boot to the torso.

Two beams of energy speared out of the darkness, one of them hitting the Chief full in the chest, draining his shields by a quarter. The second missed him by a hair's breadth.

The Chief immediately rolled to the side, taking cover behind a large, reinforced wooden box. He quickly reloaded his weapon, sliding a new magazine home with a resounding click.

This time, a trio of beams lashed out at the super-soldier, the first two burning through his makeshift cover while the third went right over. Luckily none of them hit.

The Chief fired a three round burst of suppressive fire from his pistol before quickly dashing out of cover, knowing that it would not last long against the high-powered weapons of his enemies. He used his helmet's inbuilt targeting system to guide him as he fired to the side, still running forwards.

Four of the five shots hit a target, and by the electronic gurgle he

heard, he assumed it was a kill.

A pair of beams lashed out in retaliation, but neither of them were able to hit the Chief before he hid behind a newer, more solid piece of cover.

Out of impatience, of possibly some software that ran the creatures, they began to stalk forwards towards the Chief's current position.

Figuring he should finish then fight quickly, the Chief moved out of cover and covered the distance between himself and the mechs in two quick bounds. He tackled down the closest jackal, smashing its head in with a balled fist.

The second took aim and fired at close range, and the Chief was forced to roll out of the way. Even so, he was clipped by the beam and his shields were taken down a little more.

A few quick shots from his magnum were enough to put down the automaton, clearing the rest of the robots from the room.

Chief stood up, reloading his magnum and waiting for his shields to recharge. He quickly scanned the room with his trained eyes, taking note of everything in a heartbeat. The room did seem to fit the description of a vault, as there were dozens of large, stacked boxes crowded around the space. In fact, the boxes seemed to stretch on for an incredibly long distance, and the Chief couldn't quite see the end of them.

He continued to look around, his gaze lingering on the areas closest to him. While he could not be sure, since he hadn't seen the room in its original state, but based off dust trails it seemed that several boxes had been re-arranged. Several drag marks were evident across the floor where something had been dragged to the open space where the rangers had been, but nothing was in that spot.

It appeared that something had, indeed, been moved out of the room, and the enemy had a clear head start on him.

He moved to the door, slamming it open with the palm of his hand, magnum upraised in the other.

Clear.

He walked steadily forwards, bracing his magnum with both hands. While the hallway was clear, it was certainly a mess. It seemed that there had been several iron doors protecting the vault, but each one had been blasted off its hinges by something " probably an explosive of some sort. The bodies of rangers littered the ground, yet the majority of corpses belonged to Noxian guards. Some appeared to be elite infantry, while others seemed to be mages of some sort.

They had all died in the end, though. The mechs had been intent of breaching this vault, it seemed. That made recovery of what they took all the more important.

The Chief passed through two more halls without any sort of contact.

As soon as he reached the third hallway, things changed. His motion sensor gradually lit up, with more and more contact being added every few paces.

"Chief, head right," Cortana said as the Chief's motion sensor pinged.

He did as he was told, moving to a corridor that branched off from the main one. He followed it down and turned left, and was greeted by rays of artificial lighting.

He quickly moved into cover beside the ceiling-to-floor windows that were set into the right wall of the corridor, the red rays of light making ominous patterns along the floor.

After several seconds of no contact, other than Chief's pinging motion sensor, he peered through one of the large window-things.

He was greeted by the sight of a truly enormous cavern, which could only be the under-city of Noxus. When the Chief had first heard of the 'under ground city', he hadn't really been expecting much, and was there for completely surprised to see the sprawling metropolis under the mountain city.

Spires of rock reached out from the floor of the cavern to the ceiling, either as supports for the ceiling or homes for the people. Or possibly both.

Large homes and small homes alike dotted the cavern, haphazardly placed and utterly crowding the ground.

The city seemed to be split into tiers like the upper city was, although they seemed to be artificially made rather than naturally created. Bridges connected various rock tiers and platforms, with brighter and larger buildings dominating the topmost sections.

Artificial light radiated from large, floating orbs, either hextech in creation or magic in nature. Regardless, the light that they emitted was a murky red that pulsed like a heartbeat.

At the moment, though, the most interesting thing wasn't the city itself. Rather, it was the battle raging a dozen meters below the Chief.

A large group of mechs — zealots mostly, but there were a dozen rangers there too — were forcibly pushing their way through a shield wall of Noxian soldiers. The only problem was, the soldiers did not seem to be soldiers at all. They wore patchwork armour, and their wooden shields did little to stop the weapons of the automatons.

"Completely overmatched," Chief said quietly, scanning the crowd of automatons.

"Well, we were told that the under-city had poor guards," Cortana said, repeating what they had been told by Riven several hours ago. "This just confirms it."

"They seem to be justâ€¦ pushing through," the Chief said, analyzing the battle. "These must be their only troops here."

"They may be trying to force a path through, now that they have what they need," Cortana added in.

There was the sound of splintering and people crying out. The mech force shattered the Noxian line, ploughing through it as if it was not there at all. The majority of the soldiers who were not killed outright quickly began to flee, running from the superior automaton.

The zealots advanced, but a new wave of soldiers appeared. They were even more patchwork, and in all probability they were civilians. They charged the advancing mechs, but were cut down much faster than the 'professional' soldiery had been. Even so, their bravery was commendable.

At least, the Cortana thought so.

The Chief quickly jumped onto the ledge of the window, preparing to jump down into combat.

"Wait," Cortana said quickly.

The Chief paused.

A squad of mechs walked into view. Four were jackals, all armed and combat ready, surrounding someone who was obviously the commanding officer.

The problem was, the Chief recognized the man. It was the man in black, Marin, although his appearance had somewhat changed since the last time he had seen him. Instead of the black carapace armour and sniper rifle from before, he wore heavy, bulky black armour. It resembled the armour Garen wore, although this iteration was more streamlined. The chest piece was large and protruded away from the body, while all the limbs were encased in smooth armour segments. The shoulder pads were smaller than the ones on Garen, but seemed just as thick. He carried a sparking falchion; reminiscent of the one from before, and in the other hand he carried a flat red case.

The Chief hesitated. There was no way this was the same person, was there? He had certainly killed the man before, back in the Freljord. There was a possibility it was another manâ€¦ but it seemed unlikely, given the tactics this person was employing. It was all very reminiscent of the attack on the League.

Chief raised his pistol, forgetting his previous action of jumping down. It was needlessly reckless to do so at this point.

As if by chance, the man â€" Marin, the Chief had to remind himself â€" turned his head back. His helmeted face was similar to that of a knight of old, although there was nothing noble in his face. The man saw the Chief, and the two stared at each other for a long moment.

The Chief tightened his finger on the trigger, but Marin simply turned to the side and alerted the jackals of their new target.

The Chief squeezed the trigger and fired four shots at his target's head, but the bullets were intercepted by the newly-alerted jackals.

Marin stalked off, the zealots turning to surround him. The jackals opened fire a moment later, forcing the Chief to jump off the ledge and get back into cover.

"â€|He's going to get away," the Chief concluded as pieces of stone were chipped away by plasma.

"Probs," Cortana agreed cheerfully.

Chief turned out of cover quickly and snapped off a pair of shots, killing one jackal. The return fire forced him back into cover.

_High Councilor, _the Chief thought across his mental link.

Two more shots ripped through the stone, forcing the Chief to roll across to the next window frame.

Chief fired two more shots, the bullets ripping through a jackals armour but not killing it. He reloaded his magnum with swift movements and traded it out for his assault rifle, since he was unwilling to waste any more of his ammunition for his only long-range weapon at the moment.

_Chief? _The High Councilor sent back. _Where are you? What's going on?_

_Councilor, _the Chief began, _I need you to get the two Noxian assassins â€" _

What? The who-what-now?

Chief mentally sighed. _The two assassins, Katarina and Talon. I need you to tell them â€" _

I have no idea where the assassins are, let alone why they would help us.

_Kolminye, _Chief said â€" or rather, thought â€" firmly. _I need you to find the assassins. I need you to tell them to find and kill the leader of the enemy._

_I don't â€" _

Said leader is wearing black, full plate armour, completely unmistakable. He's carrying something potentially dangerous, which should be reclaimed immediately.

_Chief â€" _

He was heading through the under-city's main street.

â€|_Fine, _Kolminye finally conceded. _I'll see what I can do._

Another beam, passing straight by the Chief's face. The Chief sprung

out of cover, firing three bursts from his rifle. He took down the jackal with the already damaged armour, leaving two left.

The Chief waited, allowing the mechs to fire again with their snipers, before launching himself over the edge.

The mechs, having just fired, needed to wait several seconds for their weapons to cool down before they could fire again. Those few seconds were all the Spartan needed to land beside them and disable both with the end of his rifle.

"â€|That was faster than expected," Cortana stated.

"We can still catch up," the Chief said, moving forwards. He could dimly hear the sound of combat from up ahead, proving that the soldiers and people in this area were still fighting. They would be able to slow the enemy down enough for the Chief to catch up.

The Chief moved five steps before he realized something was wrong. Static was running along his shields again, and he could taste ozone in his mouth.

Something wasn't right.

The powerful beam of light ripped through the building to the left, smashing into the Chief's shields and instantly reducing them to nothing.

The Chief reacted instinctively, rolling to the right and firing his assault rifle as he tried to find cover.

Another beam of light hit him, scorching his armour badly before it the beam died off.

"â€|This could be a problem," the Chief said, staring down an automaton Collective.

"Probably," Cortana said. "Remember, we need this one intact."

The Chief did not respond.

He sprung forwards suddenly, dodging and equally sudden beam from the Collective. He fired as he moved towards the large mechanical being, but all of his bullets sparked off its armoured carapace.

Another beam of energy hit the Chief, slamming him backwards. Parts of his armour began to peel under the intense energy, and the Spartan was sure his Mjolnir would not survive any more hits.

He rolled to the left, firing at the eye that marked the center of the mech. The rounds hit and, while proving more effective than the bullets that hit the outer armour, still did nothing of note.

The Collective charged the electricity that surrounded itself for a moment before letting it out again, an electric pulse slamming outwards.

The Chief was knocked back again, and a crack appeared down the right side of his visor.

The Collective floated lower to the ground as it stared at the super-soldier. Its eye began to charge up, signifying an imminent release of energy.

The Chief's rifle snapped up, aiming just behind the Collective. He fired, each shot missing the floating automaton completely.

But they hit the dead automatons behind it. The bullets, expertly placed, smashed through the torso of the nearest jackal mech, hitting its power generator. It exploded with lethal force, and the force of the detonation was enough to spark the generators of the other three mechs.

The combined explosion hit the back of the Collective, knocking it forwards and stopping any energy that tried to gather around it. The ball tried to float higher in an attempt to get itself out of danger, giving the Chief some respite.

"Geez," Cortana said. "Could you possibly make any more noise?"

The Chief, deciding that he needed to end the fight quickly, holstered his rifle and drew out his spartan laser.

"â€¦I guess so," Cortana stated with a huff.

The Chief lined up the beam with the Collective. The mech, either uncaring of the red beam staring it down or unknowing of what it represented, stared back at the Chief and began charging up its own laser.

It was too slow. The M6 Grindell/Galilean Nonlinear Rifle fired first, the red beam of high-powered energy gutting the floating ball.

It hovered there for a moment, sparking, as if unable to comprehend its own death. Then, abruptly, it crashed to the ground.

"So much for intact," Cortana muttered.

"Heimerdinger can bill me," Chief replied. He walked up to the newly made pile of scrap metal and began to shift through it. It took him several long minutes, but he finally found what he was searching for: another chip, just like the last one he had found.

"Oh," Cortana said softly. "Hello, me."

There was no response, but neither of them had been expecting one.

"We will get this sorted out later," Chief promised.

"Right," Cortana said. "You'd better keep that promise. Now, how do we get out of an underground cavern city?"

* * *

><p>Yasuo leaned heavily on his energy katana, his breathing erratic and strained. The bodies of over half a dozen automatons surrounded him, and each bore a host of slashes to indicate the cause of their death.<p>

General Darius was standing just opposite of Yasuo, his position similar. He, too, was surrounded by dead automatons.

"You know," Yasuo said, his breath coming in short gasps, "I really hate you Noxians."

"â€|Is that so?" Darius responded drily, rising to his full height.

"Yeah, I really do," Yasuo said with a grim laugh, also rising up. "You guys attacked my country, killed my people, and got me exiled."

The samurai examined the sword in his hand for several long moments.

"And yetâ€| If that hadn't happened, I doubt I would have experienced half the things I did, or have gotten into the leagueâ€|," Yasuo sheathed his katana. "Or even gotten this cool armour."

"â€|I don't understand," Darius admitted with a shake of his head.

"I'm just saying, the world works in funny ways. 'cus, if none of that happened, then I wouldn't be here, saving your assess from an army of mechs."

"â€|. I wouldn't say you are 'saving' us," Darius said, trying to clean the black oil that stained the head of his axe.

"Riiiiight," Yasuo smiled. "Just making sure you don't lose."

There was silence.

Darius looked over the edge of the gatehouse with a note of worry in his tone, "they're coming back."

Yasuo looked over as well. "Yeah, huh? We don't have enough troops anymore to hold this place. It's pretty much just you and blue team at this point." He shook his head. "Welp, never thought I'd die here, of all places."

Darius gave the Ronin a sidelong glance before turning away again. He hefted his axe, letting the great head face towards the approaching enemy. "I have no intention of dying here."

* * *

><p>Riven shook the ranger off her blade, the place that it had gotten impaled upon not two seconds before. She quickly spun the borrowed sword around in an arc, intercepting the blade descending for her neck. With a twist, she disarmed the larger zealot and drove her sword through its skull.<p>

She tried to pull the blade back out, but heard it snap and she watched the blade fall away from the hilt. She swore and tossed it aside,

She turned to look at the siege tower, which more troops were no

climbing. Making a rash decision, Riven rushed forwards, grabbed a brazier of fire, and tossed it into the waiting tower.

It took many long seconds for the tower to catch fire, but once it did, it began to collapse upon itself. While the mechs inside did not cry out, nor were there any signs of their deaths, but Riven was sure that the ones inside were crushed by the unsupported structure of the siege tower.

"Exi â€" commander," first lieutenant Mobley said, giving a half-hearted salute, "The other siege tower has been destroyed, but the courtyard is almost overrun and more zealots are grappling up the sides."

"Damnit," Riven swore. She thought for a moment as she searched the ground for a useable weapon.

One of the other soldiers offered her his sword, and she accepted it after a moment of staring. "Have the archers shoo â€" I mean, independent fire sanctioned for the archers. Primary target: courtyard," Riven said. Orders in Noxus worked differently than anywhere else, so it had taken her some time to remember how to properly give them. It almost frightened her how quickly she had, though.

Maybe her past was not as far behind her as she had thought.

Regardless, the independent fire order, once sanctioned, meant that Noxian soldiers could fire upon any target they so wished, unless otherwise specified. It would help thin out courtyard numbers, since the gates were pretty much stuck open at this point.

The attacks had been brutal and lengthy, and the gates had suffered greatly. While the automatons still did not have a strong foothold, they were inside the gatehouse block and had numerous positions along the walls. In all likelihood, the walls were lost.

"Have soldiers reform into lines on the walls," Riven continued. "Spread them out to cover as much ground as possible. We can still give the illusion of strength." She looked around. "And have the swordsmen down below go into turtle formation; it'll help them last longer."

One of the soldiers with the first lieutenant nodded and set off to hand out the orders.

Mobley himself looked like he was about to say something, but stopped when his eyes reached the skyline.

Riven followed his gaze, and swore softly once more. "Another barrage of catapult fireâ€" Everyone!" she shouted. "Brace for impact!"

* * *

><p>Garen backhanded with his sword, catching a ranger in the torso with the edge, crunching through layers of armour and vital internal systems. He wrenched it out just as quickly, machine parts trailing in its wake, and raised it in order to block a salvo of shots from another ranger.<p>

"Archers!" Garen shouted, before realizing there were no Demacian archers in hearing range. He looked around. "Lux! Lux, I need ranged support!"

The ranger was soon joined by another two.

It took several seconds, but an orb of brilliant energy descended in the midst of the new ranger squad and promptly tore them apart.

He did not bother shouting in thanks, since he knew his sister would already be moving on to the next target. There were far too many enemies to take even a moment to rest and be lax.

"You two!" Garen shouted to two Demacian elite that were nearby. "Reinforce the third rank!"

The moved to obey at once, but Garen already knew it would be fruitless. It would take more than two people to keep that line intact.

"If only you Noxian could coordinate more," Garen said, talking to the person beside him, "this fight would already be over."

The Noxian commander spit on the ground. "Tch. Yeah, right. It's all because your soldiers can't fight properly."

A ranger lunged forwards, and the Noxian commander sidestepped the mech. As it stumbled past him, he swung back on of his wicked axes and, with a charming smile, neatly bisected the mech.

He continued to smile even as he returned to his original position, spinning his axe with one hand. "Welcome one, welcome all, welcome to the lea â€" "

He was cut short by another ranger that unleashed a flurry of plasma shots. The shots, thankfully, missed, but managed to completely throw the Noxian off guard.

Garen ran forwards, both his hands clutching his sword. The ranger tried to fire at the approaching Demacian knight, but its shots merely scorched the powerful armour. Once Garen was within range he jumped up and delivered a punishing blow to the automaton, cutting it vertically in half.

Garen glanced back at the Noxian. "Try not to get caught out, Draven."

Draven, the glorious executioner, sighed. "I totally had that."

"I can't believe they left you in charge," Garen said as he directed a squad of soldiers to the fourth defensive line.

"I know," Draven agreed sympathetically, "I should be in charge of the whole army, not just this small piece."

Garen gave a drawn out sigh.

There was the sound of men screaming, and it drew Garen's attention to the right. A formation of soldiers had just been torn apart by a

group of ranger-pattern mechs led by several zealots, and the automatons were quickly advancing into the center of the Demacian formation.

"Here we go," Draven said dramatically as he raised both axes high. He threw them forwards, and they whirled forwards in an unstoppable line. They ripped lines into the stone ground before ripping into the advancing enemy, cutting down the majority of them before the axes returned to their owner.

Draven hefted the axes and looked to Garen. "Heh?" he said with a smile.

Garen sighed.

"Hey! Youâ€¦ personâ€¦ peopleâ€¦ fill in those gaps!" Draven shouted towards a demi-squad of Noxian swordsmen. They exchanged glances and hurried off to follow the order.

Draven glanced around. He raised his hand to a group of crossbowmen, drawing their attention. "You there!" Draven shouted. "Direct fire sanctioned onâ€¦ those guys there." He waved his hand in the general direction of the automatons. The crossbowmen hurried to obey their leaders vague order, firing their bolts at the mechanical horde.

Two zealots pushed their way past some Noxian spearmen and charged in unison, aiming their blades towards Garen.

The first mech was intercepted by champion Settara, and the two engaged in a brutal close combat.

The second continued onwards, and Garen braced himself for the imminent impact. The zealot hit him, knocking him back a step, but Garen was able to turn the enemies' red blade aside with his weapon.

Garen spun, knocking the automaton back, and Garen continued to spin. He landed five hits on the mech, shattering the armour that protected its precious parts. The mech tried to get itself into a better position, but Garen lashed out with his fist, grabbed the internal parts of the mech, and pulled. The mech fell, lifeless.

Draven threw an axe, killing a ranger that had run through a ruined building. He caught the axe with swift movements, and threw it again as another ranger passed through the rubble.

And another.

And another.

"Ehâ€¦ seriously, I don't think we can win this," Draven said.

"Itâ€¦ will be difficult," Garen said carefully.

There was a flash of light, and a line of Demacian soldiers fell, dead. Garen and Draven could only look in horror as a pair of massive hunter mechs walked into view, their cannons smoking.

"Time for us champions to shine, eh?" Draven said, looking to

Garen.

"What?"

"Champions. You know, league champs?" Draven sighed. "Where have you been the last year?"

"Right, I almost forgot," Garen mumbled. He had almost forgotten his mandate as a champion, and purpose for which he fought.

The first hunter began to run forwards with heavy steps, knocking aside anything that came within range. Garen ran forwards to meet it, his blade glowing with barely contained power.

The hunter swung its cannon arm around, and Garen rolled to the left before delivering a swift slash to the enemies' torso.

The blade bounced off harmlessly.

The mech kicked out, knocking Garen back and knocking the wind out of him. His armour protected him from the worst of the impact.

Draven used the distraction to land several axes upon the hunter, but they did negligible damage at best.

The hunter turned, swinging the barrel of its weapon round. It began to charge up.

Garen tackled the large automaton, knocking it off balance for a second. He used his closer range to stab it with his lightning-wreathed sword, cutting into it.

The mech shook him off, forcing him to the ground. It raised its shield arm high, intending to crush the Demacian warrior.

The mech suddenly found itself off balance, Draven having thrown a pair of axes parallel to the ground. The hunter's shield missed Garen and hit the ground, impaling itself half a meter deep.

Garen rose up shakily and turned to Draven, nodding his head slightly in thanks. Draven smiled and spun his axes.

Garen brought his sword up high, reversed it so it was facing downwards, and stabbed. There was a bright light and a loud cracking noise as all the electricity in the sword discharged at once, all released directly into the hunter's body. There were several internal, muted explosions as the hunter died from the inside.

"So just one left," Draven concluded, staring at the other hunter.

Just then there was a rumbling noise, and one of the drill-transporters surfaced behind the pair.

"Hell," Garen swore. They were now surrounded on both sides.

"Hunter first," Draven said, eyeing the hunter.

A small beam of light began to shine, and it seemed to rest upon the hunter's small head. At the same time, the hunter's beam cannon began

to charge.

"Careful," Garen warned. "Might be a new trick."

A beam of potent energy fired, and the hunter exploded from the waist up.

Draven had a confused look on his face as he stared at the ruined, smoking remains of the hunter-pattern automaton.

Garen looked back, only to see the Master Chief standing in the open hatch of the drill transport, a massive smoking weapon slung over one shoulder.

Garen could only stare as the Spartan jumped down, holstering the larger weapon and taking out his automatic gun. He fired deafening shots from the weapon, cutting down mechs far easier than Garen had with his sword.

"Spartan," Garen said, nodding his head respectfully. The Chief nodded back, but kept his attention on the enemy.

The enemy seemed to change the moment the Chief stepped onto the battlefield. They began to fight more viscously, as if to get to the super-solider quickly.

The Master Chief stepped past the two leaders, moving forwards to shore up the gap opened by the hunters. Garen noted that the Chief's armour was more cracked and blackened than before, evident of some hard fighting.

Draven could only stare as he passed.

"Something wrong?" Garen asked, not really caring but attempting to be polite.

"â€¦I am so a better adc than that guy," Draven said dramatically.

Garen snorted. "Yeah, right, so am I."

"Demacian second rank!" the Chief shouted from up ahead, drawing Garen's attention. "Move up and tighten formation!"

Garen ran up to the Chief, as did Draven.

"Chief," Garen started, "Second rank will not hold up to the zealots."

"Noxian spearmen!" Chief continued, ignoring Garen, "Form up behind the Demacian rank! Thin spread!"

"Chief?" Draven asked this time, tossing his axes at random targets.

The Chief ignored him, emptying his rifle in one long burst and reloading it.

"Chief, they are not holding," Garen said, and it was true. The zealots were laying into the Demacian second rank with wild abandon,

tearing them apart.

Still nothing from the Chief.

"Chiefâ€|"

"Demacian second rank! Break ranks!" Chief shouted as he gunned down one of the sniper mechs.

The Demacian rank spread apart, and the zealots that had been slashing wildly found themselves stumbling forwards as their targets disappeared.

"Noxians, forwards!" Chief shouted, a continuation of his previous order.

The Noxian spearmen advanced, impaling the zelaots on their spears, out of range of their deadly red swords.

"Demacians, close ranks!" was the Chief's final order. The Demacians closed ranks again, locking formation as the zealots were stuck on the Noxian spears. They suddenly found the tables turned on them as the Demacians vented their fury upon the larger and deadlier mechs.

"Didn't see that one coming," Draven said in an almost conspiratorial whisper.

Chief moved back two steps, firing a single burst from his rifle. "It may not be enough," he said. The enemy still outnumbered the meager forces in the area, and were much stronger as well.

"We can move back and consolidate," Garen said as he stabbed a range through the skull, "with you, we can hold out."

The Chief paused suddenly.

"â€|Chief?" Garen inquired, wondering as to why the large man had just stopped.

The Chief tilted his head skyward.

"What's up?" Settar asked, finally reaching the group. He looked like he had gone through hell, since his armour was rent and torn in nearly a dozen places. His once double headed axe now only featured on head, and his helmet was missing.

Garen stopped, too, as he heard the sound. It was like rushing wind and a loud whine, and it was almost familiar.

Less than a minute later, a flying vehicle roared over the area. It resembled the pelican that the Chief had flown before, and it took Garen a little while to realize it was the very same construct.

The pelican opened fire upon the plaza, heavy machine guns roaring to life, tearing apart formations of enemy infantry. The enemy was forced to run for cover from the new, deadly enemy vehicle.

A group of jackals raised their rifles skyward and fired their weapons, the beams deflecting off the sloping armour of the

pelican.

In retaliation, a weapon dropped itself from under the cockpit and aimed below, towards the mechs. It was vaguely triangular, and was composed of three prongs with energy spiraling in the middle.

It fired, a line of red energy slamming into the ground a slicing through the squad. Half the mechs were killed, and a glowing red line fifteen meters long was cut into the ground. A half minute later, the red line detonated, the energy residue left inside reacting violently and explosively with the open air.

The Master Chief tapped the side of his helmet, and began to talk. "Why are you here?"

Viktor responded, and it took Garen several moments to realize Viktor's voice was coming from Garen's comm unit and not the Spartan. Apparently, Viktor had patched into all the comm units used by the allied army.

"I got tired of waiting," he said, "and especially when you leave such nice things lying around."

"Viktorâ€¦," the Chief warned.

"I will give it back when I am done," Viktor said, firing the cannons once more into the enemy crowd.

"Go and reinforce the gatehouses," Chief told the pilot of the pelican. "They need the help."

"Fine," Viktor sighed. The pelican hovered for a moment, before rising up and flying off.

Garen turned to the side and caught Draven staring. "What's wrong this time?" he asked, still uncaring but still trying to make a conscious effort of friendship.

Draven continued to stare at the retreating pelican. After one minute, his face changed into one of triumph.

"â€¦What?" Garen said, dreading the answer.

"I'm totally a better adc with him," Draven said confidently, a smile on his face.

Settar face palmed.

* * *

><p>The Chief removed his fist from the chest of the mech, the seventh he had killed in as many minutes. The mechs had already begun to retreat, although the Spartan was not sure why. It seemed rather odd.<p>

_Chief? _Kolminye's voice reverberated in his skull.

_Councilor, _the Chief responded respectfully.

Good news. We have found Jarvan and Swain.

_That's great, _Chief responded honestly. _When will they be ready to take command?_

_Wellâ€¦ that's the thing, _Kolminye said._ They do not want to. They will lead from the front, and wish to leave command in your capable hands._

_Iâ€¦ the Chief was unsure. This wasn't supposed to happen, there was protocol to be observed. You don't just give command to someone that held no rankâ€¦ that was wrong.

But nothing really made sense here. Chief knew that. And really, he was the most capable for this, even if he did not know the armies he was leading. It made sense from a tactical standpoint, but that was the only standpoint it made sense from.

But he would do it.

"You could do it," Cortana said smoothly.

_Understood, _the Master Chief finished, and began the re-conquest of Noxus.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

Marin walked down the stony path, his armour plates clanking against each other with every foot fall. For someone who was sued to stealth operations, this completely ruined that. He resolved to fix the issue as soon as he got back to base with his cargo.

He looked down to said cargo, which was cradled in his left arm. It was a flat case, sort of like a briefcase but far more armoured. He was not entirely sure what was inside, but it was probably best that he did not know. It's not like he really cared, anyways.

He entered into a large cavern, the place he had designated as extraction point 'Sunder'. It was not fairly large, but numerous other caverns branched off from this one and there were rocky pillars dotted around the area, so there was ample cover.

Not the ideal place for an extraction point, but he could only work with what he was given to work with.

The mech guard squad fanned out around him. Just ahead, at the back of the cavern, was a larger and more plated drill transport, the side hatch already open and waiting. He stepped towards it, and stopped.

He looked around. _There should have been four jackals on sentry duty here_, he realized somewhat belatedly.

Quickly he gave orders to the mechs around him using his visor, so no one could hear them being issued. To any bystander, it would appear that the mechs had started moving of their own accord.

The mechs spread out to the tunnels, moving through them in groups of two. Marin wanted to make sure nothing was lying in wait.

He turned his attention back to the room. Nothing was hiding atop the pillars, and that really limited available hiding places.

He looked back to the drill transport, and the open and waiting hatch.

Marin smiled. He sidestepped just three razor-sharp shurikens launched out of the darkness, slicing right through the air where he was a moment before.

Marin glanced at the shurikens as they passed, his visor scanning them. He wasn't entirely sure who his opponent was, but based off the data he could hazard a guess. And based off that guess, he also knew where the next attack would come from.

Marin swiftly turned, his blade in a guard positioned, and managed to block the blade that had descended for his throat.

The cloaked man he faced stared at him as their two weapons were matched against each other. The moment lasted for only a second before the man disengaged and disappeared into the darkness of the cave.

Marin stood still for a moment, analyzing attack patterns with the use of his helmet's system. It is really quite incredible; he had to concede to himself. The professor had outdone himself this time.

Marin stepped back and arched his back as the arm-blade of his opponent grazed over him. Marin returned with a stab of his humming falchion, the energy-wreathed sword grazing the cloaked man. No blood was drawn, but the man stepped back warily.

With another command spoken into his helmet, the mechs began to return from their patrols. The rangers took up position amongst the spires as the zealots moved towards the would-be-assassin.

Marin raised his blade, about to drop in and order the rangers to fire, when the man simply vanished.

Marin could only stare for a moment at the empty spot, before realizing what was about to happen.

He quickly threw himself to the ground as a wave of daggers swept out of the shadows and assaulted the ranger line, slicing through and killing nearly half of the gunner mechs.

"Damn," Marin swore. He got back up, ordering his zealots in a semi-circle and allowing the rangers to fill in the gaps.

Another dagger was flung out of the darkness near the top of the cave, hitting the one ranger. The dagger cut deep, but bounced off the curving armour plates of its shoulder and hit the next ranger, grazing it only slightly before bouncing to the last ranger in range and puncturing its skull, killing it.

Two zealots turned, and with a flash of light another assassin appeared. She sported a mane of red hair that swung around as she dodged the first zealots blade. She spun with her daggers

outstretched, cutting into its torso but failing to do any significant damage.

The second zealot swung wide, but the redhead disappeared and reappeared behind it in another flash of light. She grabbed a handful of smaller daggers and began to spin rapidly, throwing them out at speed. While the smaller daggers would normally be unable to penetrate the tough armour of the zealots, they seemed to be magically-infused and they cut through the automatons like they were tissue paper. By the end of it, three zealots were lying in heaps on the floor.

Marin stepped back as the redhead turned to face him. He ordered his rangers to fire, but the redhead jumped up, grabbed one of the pillars, and swung herself around, disappearing from the automaton commanders sight.

Marin got two steps towards the back before the assassin materialized in front of him, spinning out with her daggers.

Marin blocked them with the flat of his sword before lunging downwards, forcing her to guard with both of her daggers.

Marin began to push downwards, and the assassin realized she was not match for the man in strength, and disengaged but blinking back several meters.

Marin quickly turned and moved to the side, dodging two out of the three shurikens that had been thrown for him. The one that hit only scrapped his shoulder armour, lacking the power to puncture through.

Marin shook his head. He was surrounded on both sides. The two assassins had torn through his squad, and though there were some left, it was not nearly enough. While he and his troops were tougher and superior, the assassins were faster, cleverer, and had knowledge of the terrain. And out of four would be fatal.

The male assassin swept forwards, his arm-dagger shining with a sickening light. He thrust forwards, and Marin caught the blade at the last second with the hilt of his falchion.

He slide his blade along the other mans, drawing himself closer to his would-be killer. Marin tilted his head towards the man, and simultaneously activated one of the sub-programs the professor had out in.

"I apologize," Marin said gravely, "but this is where I must leave you."

The hooded man's face flashed with confusion. It lasted for less than a second, but Marin had seen it and knew what it meant.

"Take a look around," Marin said. He then disengaged, swirling around before sheathing his blade with a flourish. He bowed to the two assassins mockingly.

The hooded man kept his eyes on his target, while the other one looked out into the cavern.

All the automatons, both dead and alive, had blinking red lights in their visors.

The redhead turned to her companion questioningly.

Marin quickly dashed into the drill transport, closing the hatch behind him. While he loathed retreating, it was necessary in this situation. And technically, he would still win.

He used his visor to activate the self-destruct protocols on all the automatons in the cave, and while he could not see the blast nor confirm the deaths of the two killers, he felt the explosion.

And it felt powerful.

* * *

><p>This is why I slit the chapter in half. Really long, with a lot of themes.

Anyways, thanks for the reviews guys. Always helps me write to a greater quality (mostly so I can tell what stuff messed up on again). If you feel like you can drop a review this time around, it sure would be appreciated.

So... yeah. That's it for the Siege of Noxus arc.

Oh yeah, the new Marin. In case you care about what he like, take a look at Steel Legion Garen, imagine the armour black and smoother, with smaller should pads and green lighting. Alternatively, look at any Grey Knight Terminator and imaging it with smaller shoulders and man-sized.

C ya.

41. Chapter 41

Chapter 41: Truth and Reconciliation

"How does it feel?" the Master Chief asked his companion.

"â€|I dunno. The same, I guess," replied Cortana.

After nearly half an hour of tinkering and ignoring summons from the High Councilor, Viktor had finally managed to install and sync the two Cortana data chips that the Chief now had in his possession. Sadly, if the Chief was expecting an immediate difference, he was mistaken. Cortana had yet to do or say anything different, and the Chief was beginning to get worried that the chip had suffered damage from the laser.

Viktor rose up from his crouched position, the servo motors in his legs whining. "I am still angry that you could not capture the collective intact," he said with a shake of his head.

"Tell that to the mech army," the Chief replied. That was the fourth time Viktor had brought up the Collective, and it was starting to annoy the Chief. And he didn't get annoyed easily, so that wasn't a good sign for the machine herald.

"Rest assured, I shall," Viktor said with a hint of smugness. It was entirely possible he had taken the Chief's comment seriously, and that made the Spartan want to face palm.

"Are you, ah—" the Noxian lieutenant, Mobley-something-or-other, tried to say. He seemed almost nervous to be in the same room as the two Champions. "Are y-you ready to attend?"

"Tell the High Councilor we will be right there," Viktor ordered the man, dismissing him with a sweep of his hand.

The man all but ran out of the room.

"Nice one, Vik," Cortana commented.

"Do not call me that," Viktor scolded as he tightened some obscure gear in his mechanical arm.

"You almost sounded regal there," the A.I finished, having totally ignored the machine-man. "Maybe we can make you a prince when this is all done."

"I find that notion less than impressive," Viktor said impassively, his skull-shaped face glinting in the firelight of the room.

The Chief shook his head. Cortana really didn't seem any different, and that was a problem. Unfortunately, he lacked the tools and expertise to even attempt to fix her, so he could only hope she got better with time.

"Shall we be off?" Viktor inquired, finally fixing the kink that had developed in his arm.

The Chief nodded slowly. He had put off the High Councilor's summons for long enough, and had no wish to make her angry. He just thought of the summons as less important than 'fixing' Cortana.

He allowed Viktor to lead the way, following him through all the halls despite knowing exactly where he was supposed to be going.

Every hall they passed by bore the scars of the recent battle. Fallen masonry, shattered cement and broken doors dotted the path to the throne room, and many other branching hallways were completely collapsed. The palace had not emerged unscathed at all, as the Chief had learned upon return to the palace. The mechs had tried to force their way in three times, and had managed to penetrate quite far on each occasion. They had been repulsed eventually, but not without a great cost in life and only due to the valiant efforts of Kayle and LeBlanc.

The walk through the palace was somewhat different than the first time Chief had gone through. Noxian soldiers were here, but so were Demacian soldiers; albeit in much smaller numbers. Still, it was an improvement.

Every soldier they passed, whether they be native or foreign, turned to stare at the Spartan as he passed. The Chief had experienced this kind of attention before when he was in the UNSC — he still was,

technically â€" but it still made him a bit uncomfortable. It wasn't his place to be lauded. He was a weapon of humanity; that was all.

The two finally reached the large doors that marked the entrance to the throne room. It seemed to be relatively unscathed, with the most damage being three scorch marks on the carpeting off the floor.

Viktor opened both doors with his hands, pushing them out wide as he strode into the room. The Chief followed behind him, walking with less grace than his mechanical companion.

"I have arrived!" Viktor announced in his grating, accented voice.

Absolutely no one in the room acknowledged him.

The Chief passed the Machine Herald, moving up towards the center of the room.

The layout had changed considerably since the last time the Chief had been here. Instead of long, noble feasting tables, there were dozens of smaller tables covered in maps and charts and graphs. Advisors much like the ones that had helped the Chief were clustered around those tables, but there were far more than he had seen before.

Elite Noxian guards were lined up along the back wall, looking almost regal in their shining gold armour and deep green tunics.

Members of the Dauntless Vanguard were also present, although they took up spots nearer to the entrance. Their armour bore the scars of battle, making it evident that they had fought on the front lines.

The High Councilor was at the front, deep in conversation with Swain, the grand general of Noxus. The man seemed to be relatively uninjured, with the exception of his already long since broken leg and a wrap around his left hand, which was a testament to his considerable regenerative abilities.

Jarvan IV, prince of Demacia, was sitting at a low table near the pair. His leg was bandaged up, as was his right arm and part of his face. He had taken the brunt of the damage, it seemed, and was clearly suffering for it. Although, he still managed to seem annoyed at the entire situation.

As the Chief neared the pair, Swain turned away from Kolminye and instead focused upon the approaching Spartan. "Looks like our hero has arrived," the man said with a gravely chuckle.

The Chief stood still like he always did, fully at attention.

Kolminye looked annoyed. "Grand General â€" "

"Just say 'Swain'," Swain corrected. "You always have, and there is no need for false formalities now."

"Yesâ€|" Kolminye conceded hesitantly.

Swain turned away from her again. "I believe I have you to thank for saving my city," he said to the Chief with a tilt of his head.

The Chief nodded. While he still wasn't so good with emotions and such, he had the feeling that Swain did not actually mean the thanks he said.

"Swain, We must know your position in the current affairs of the land," Kolminye pressed.

"Geez, woman," Jarvan loudly complained. "Just say 'war', would you? No need to spice things up."

Kolminye turned to give the Demacian prince a withering glare. "Do not presume that you can talk to me as if to a friend. We are not. I am still High Councilor of the league." She turned to Swain. "And that goes for you, too. The Master Chief may have just saved your city, but he is still under employ by the league. My league."

"And I will remember that," Swain said coldly. He waited for several moments, and the Chief was sure he did that just to build tension. "I will, of course, fight alongside your army."

"That is good," Jarvan said. "I am sure we can find a way to share command in a respectable and join-"

"But not an army under your command," Swain finished. "Nor yours," he said to Kolminye.

Jarvan frowned and Kolminye raised an eyebrow.

"I will only join an army led by " he stopped.

He waited.

"Him," Swain said, pointing to the Spartan.

"That's not possible," Kolminye said at the same time Jarvan said, "Okay. Sure."

The both glared at each other after that.

Swain chuckled, and the Chief decided it was time for him to step in.

"I am glad to hear that you will join us," Chief began, "but this is not my army to lead."

"But lead it you did," Swain said. He sent a sly glance to the league representatives. "And I trust you far more than I do them."

"The Master Chief is, as I have already said, under League directive. An army lead by him is essentially "

Kolminye was cut off, again.

"That is my condition," Swain said, reclining on his throne. "Take it or leave it."

Kolminye was silent for a long time. Jarvan looked annoyed, and after two minutes of silence he blurted out, "Hell, don't tell me you're actually considering rejecting his offer?"

Kolminye turned to look at him. "You're one to talk. You hate Noxians, and would reject anything that they â€" "

"Yeah, that's true," Jarvan admitted. "But even I will concede that I may have been a bitâ€| thickheaded before. Their army fought alongside ours to defend their city, and Swain helped me out of that pit the bomb created. They are not all bad."

"And we apologized," LeBlanc's silken voice drifted through as she entered the room.

"And they apologized for the misunderstanding," Jarvan added.

Kolminye huffed. "Fine. The Master Chief will be placed in charge of all armed forces currently assembled under the title of the 'allied army', and will â€" "

"Wait," the Chief interrupted. "I don't lead armies."

"Will everyone cease to interrupt me?" the High Councilor demanded angrily. After waiting a moment to make sure she was not about to be interrupted, she spoke. "You will need to learn how, Chief. The Gran General isâ€| right. You are the most capable and trustworthy."

"I feel like I should resent that," Jarvan mumbled.

"Iâ€|" The Chief was speechless for a second. He had told them no, twice. He wasn't trained to lead large armies; he never had to. Battle groups, sure, but thousands of men? He was spec. ops. That wasn't what he did.

But they had not listened to him, and it would not do any good to continue on rejecting the proposal. At least, he would be at the forefront with more freedom in battle.

"Understood."

"Good â€" " Kolminye tried to say, before the doors slammed open.

General Darius walked in, his axe strapped across his back. The wickedly curved axe head was stained with blood and dirt, and the man's armour looked terrible. Clearly, he had been through heavy fighting.

He dropped to one knee when he came within five meters of Swain's throne. "My lord."

"Rise," Swain said, motioning upwards with his cane. "What is the problem."

Darius looked around uncertainly.

"You may speak freely," LeBlanc said. "We are all such _good _friends here."

Darius nodded. "Two of our assassins, Talon and Katarina, were sent on a recovery mission."

"And this is known to us," Swain said, nodding.

"They failed." Darius concluded with grave finality.

Swain sat up straighter. Kolminye tilted her head in interest.

"Their foe managed to escape with a high-value object from the sigma vault. An explosion was used to mask his escape, which weakened the integrity of the under-city, causing partial structural collapse in several places. The two assassins made it out with minor injuries."

"And they failed to recover the stolen item?"

"Yes," Darius confirmed.

"Hm," Swain pondered. "Send them to me at the adjournment of this meeting. There are things I must talk to them about."

"What was stolen?" The Chief asked, curious as to what Marin was protecting with such a large explosion. And since he was the person who had ordered those assassins to recover it, he felt some responsibility for them.

Swain and Darius both turned to look at the Chief. Swain looked almost amused while Darius seemed a little unsure.

"What was stolen?" The Chief repeated, phrasing his question as a demand.

Swain looked away and said casually, "An essence reaver rune."

"A what?" Kolminye burst out at once. "A _what?_"

"A rune, I believe he said," LeBlanc said, a viper's smile on her lips as he reclined against the arm rest of the Noxian throne.

"You _know _those are forbidden," Kolminye said angrily.

"Runes were banned at the inception of the league of legends, and were confiscated by the Summoners of that time," Cortana clarified over the internal comm channel.

"I know," the Chief responded. He had read up the entire history of the institute back when he there, and had committed everything to memory. He had suspected, of course, that the treaties made at that time had not been fully upheld but he had never thought it may cause a problem for him at some point in the future.

"What does an essence reaver rune do?" the Chief asked, for clarification. He had certainly seen a rune by that name in the rift shop, but had never actually needed to purchase it. However, if the name was any indication, it was not good.

Kolminye was the one who spoke, but the entire time she locked eyes

with Swain. "An essence weaver does exactly what its name implies â€" reaves essences, souls. It was used commonly by executioners during pre-institute days, when they needed guaranteed deaths."

"Sounds friendly," Cortana muttered.

"Which is why I must know why one of those is still in your possession," Kolminye continued.

Swain shrugged. "We cannot keep track of all our weapons. Certainly some things in the vaults may have beenâ€" overlooked." He pointed to the Demacian prince. "As I'm sure our mutual friend can attest to."

Jarvan shrugged nonchalantly, and Kolminye sent him a withering glare too. "I demand a search of your weapon vaults. That goes for both of you."

Jarvan shrugged again, and Swain smiled thinly. "Of course," the grand general said, "but that will take much time."

The Chief was able to pick up the underlying message in Swain's statement: we have plenty of places to hide things.

apparently, the High Councilor picked up on that too.

"So be it," the High Councilor Kolminye responded, her face a stony mask.

Silence.

"Well, it's been great to get all our ideas down," Cortana said in a friendly manner, scaring some of the nearby people who were unused to her voice. "But I think it's about time we took a break, huh?"

The tension was so thick in the room that even the Chief could feel it. He was ultimately glad when the High Councilor led him from the room.

* * *

><p>The High Councilor paced back and forth, her ankle-length robes swishing around her.<p>

The Chief was leaning against a pillar ever so slightly, watching her move. While he normally always stood at attention, he allowed himself a small reprieve this time around. He had just marched halfway across a continent, only to defend a city from a massive siege. Even he knew not to push himself too hard.

And it really wasn't helping that the High Councilor had been pacing aimlessly for the last twenty minutes. Chief was used to activity, not inactivity.

"She seems really beat up about the rune thing," Cortana had commented earlier. The Chief had agreed with her then, and still did now.

"High Councilor," the Chief began tentatively, "perhaps we should formulate our next plan of attack."

The High Councilor snorted. "Yeah, right. _They_ have super-dangerous magical artefacts, our _allies_ have super deadly magical artifactsâ€| really, who doesn't have super-deadly magical artifacts?"

"Us?" Cortana offered.

"Councilor, the rune problem can be dealt with when we get to it," Chief said calmly, trying to turn the conversation into something more productive.

"It is a problem now," she said. "I will not have another rune war while I am in charge."

The Chief stayed silent, and the Councilor continued pacing.

She stopped a little while later. She turned towards the Chief, staring up at the much taller man. "What do you want to do?"

Chief tilted his head.

Kolminye snorted. "You're in charge now, remember? It's up to you what we do."

Chief was not sure what the High Councilor was referring to. Did she mean his plans for the war, or for the runes? Probably the war. It made the most logical sense.

"Ionia," he said after some internal thinking. "They have maintained their neutrality, but we may need their forcesâ€| and everyone else has committed."

Kolminye snorted again, and the Chief found the action slightly annoying. He was used to some commanders being judgmental and â€" in more extreme cases â€" outright negative, but this was different. He definitely did not enjoy it.

"You want to get the most peaceful state to declare war?" she asked with a raised eyebrow.

The Chief nodded.

"Without knowing who we're fighting?"

"We know who we're fighting â€" "

"We know _who_ we're fighting," Kolminye interrupted, "but not _who_ we're fighting. We know their leader, their soldiers, their capabilities, yet nothing of where they are or who is funding them." She shook her head. "Even if they were not getting funded, location is key in this situation. We have nowhere to commit our forces _to."_"

"Wellâ€|" Cortana began hesitantly, "That's not entirely true."

"You remember something?" Chief asked immediately.

"Not exactlyâ€|"

Kolminye snorted for a third time.

"But I do remember the base structure, to an extent. If I had more data, I might be able to get a match."

"That's vague and un-useful," Kolminye said. "I could have my Summoners do the same thing."

"But they are being blocked by some outside source," the Chief stated with a tilt of his head. He knew that much, at least, even if Kolminye did not expect him to know it. And, judging from her expression, she did not.

"Yes," Kolminye admitted after a long moment of deliberation, "but that still leaves us with your vague assumptions."

The Chief stayed silent.

"You know," Cortana hummed, "Since the Chief is technically in charge right now, or will be soon enough, he can have us do whatever he wants to do. Technically."

"That is not even a technicality," Kolminye huffed.

"I've said my piece," Chief said. "That's what I think we should do."

He looked around the room, taking note of all that was in it — or rather, what it was lacking.

"I'm going to see my team," he said. "The choice is yours."

"We are not finished yet!" the High Councilor shouted at his retreating form.

The armoured giant simply opened the door and exited.

* * *

><p>"That wasn't really like you," Cortana noted as they passed through the empty halls.<p>

The pair knew where they were going, because they had been informed of the status of blue team upon entering the palace. All of them had suffered injuries, ranging from minor to major, but all would make a full recovery.

"I don't trust her," the Chief told his A.I companion privately. "She's too much like —"

"Like Ackerson?" Cortana finished.

"Yes," was his hesitant reply.

Silence.

"Well, she doesn't seem all bad," Cortana said. "Maybe just a bit power-hungry."

"Power corrupts."

"Ah,_" Cortana said teasingly. "Power _tends _to corrupt."

The Chief did not respond, instead allowing himself to mull it over in his head. She was correct, after all. The High Councilor did have everyone's best interests in mind, but hers were simply at the center of all those interests. And really, everyone else here seemed to think the same way. And he had certainly dealt with those types before.

They passed another few hallways in silence. When they finally reached the room meant for blue, he walked through without the thought to knock.

Yasuo was there, playing around with a battle-rifle. Riven was wrapping a white cloth around her left bicep, grimacing a bit as she did so. Graves was smoking a cigar, his jacked lying on the floor, his chest covered in bandages that were tinged red. Thresh was playing with his lantern, or whatever it was that he did with the glowing thing.

They all noticed the Chief at the same time, but it was Riven who spoke first.

"You look like hell."

It got a chuckle out of Graves and Cortana, and the Chief had to slap his helmet to stop the latter.

"There was a party," the Chief said wryly. He could hear Cortana complaining about the hit over the internal comm, but payed it no heed.

"Wow. Fierce party." Yasuo grinned at the Chief. "So what's this I hear about you bein' the savior of Noxus?"

Chief did not answer him, instead moving to Graves and examining his wounds. "

"I'm fine," the shotgunner said. "Just some scratches."

The Chief allowed his visor to scan the bio-readings of Graves. While he was not connected to the Chief's team bio-readouts (no one had been in a long time, in fact,) he could still scan manually. It took a little bit of time, but it confirmed with a beep and a green light that Graves was recovering well.

The Chief nodded to him and stepped back. He looked over to Riven, but she had already covered up her bandaged arm. Thinking it was possible she did so because the wound was not major, he did not question her about it.

"So, seriously, savior stuff and all that?" Yasuo asked again.

"What is our next course of action?" Thresh asked, his attention still focused solely upon his lantern.

"Why does everyone keep ignoring me?!" Yasuo cried out, tossing the battle rifle to the floor.

It discharged with a loud bang, the trio of round burying themselves into the wall a meter from the Chief's head.

Chief turned to face Yasuo slowly. He met his eyes, and glared at him.

"Iâ€| ahâ€|" Yauso seemed at a loss for words, simply staring at the golden mirrored visor of the Chief. "I'm just going to stop nowâ€|"

The Chief turned back to Thresh after a long moment. "We may be going to Ionia," he said.

"Wait, what?" Riven and Yasuo half-shouted at the same moment.

"We may be going to Ionia?" the Chief repeated again, wondering as to why they seemed so angry at the idea.

"No it's just - " the two said at the same time, before looking at each other in annoyance and turning away.

Riven spoke first. "It's justâ€| bad memories there."

Yasuo snorted.

"The war, and all that," she clarified, giving Yasuo an icy stare.

It was then that the Chief realized he did not actually know what Riven had gone through in Ionia. He did recall her saying something, but nothing of any substance. He'd have to rectify that later.

"Well, I have a bit more of an important problem," Yasuo said as he matched Riven's stare. "See, I can't actuallyâ€| be there, ya know?"

"No, not really," Thresh said with a shake of his head. The Chief felt inclined to agree.

"I mean, I've been banished," the Wanderer said. "And they all kinda want to kill me."

"So the usual, then?" Graves asked, tossing his cigar to the side. It landed on the floor, the end glowing faintly in the shadowed room.

"Watch it," Yasuo warned.

"They cannot hurt you on a diplomatic mission," Chief said. "If there is a problem when we get there, we can deal with it."

"And they probably won't even let you in," Yasuo said thoughtfully. "I mean, I'm not sure how much they've changed, but they tend not to allow dangers into their city. And wherever you go, things tend toâ€| no longer be intact."

The Chief blinked.

"Not to say that... what I mean is, Ionian's aren't exactly trusting

since theâ€| he trailed off as the Chief continued to stare at him. "Some help me, please," Yasuo whimpered.

"Sure," Graves said, reaching over for his shotgun, "I'll help ya out."

Yasuo leapt at Graves, tackling him to the floor.

The Master Chief, unable to contain himself, shook his head and gave out a snort â€" or perhaps more of a grunt â€" of amusement. It lasted for barely a second, and most of the team missed it, but not Riven. She looked at him and flashed him a knowing smile as Graves and Yasuo fought on the floor.

* * *

><p>"Does it really matter?" Jarvan IV, exemplar of Demacia, asked.<p>

"Of course it does," Kolminye said. "We need to be on the offensive, not trying to get peaceful states to declare war."

"The more the merrier," Luxanna crownguard said cheerfully.

"Number would help," Jarvan agreed thoughtfully. "They are numerically superiorâ€| and technologically superior."

"But â€" " Kolminye started.

"I'm thinking you are just reluctant to loose command," Sejuani interrupted. She had gotten back to the palace on recently. She had been angry at her injuries from the sabotage, and In atonement had sought out the remaining mechs in the top-most quadrant of the city and ground them to dust. Literal dust. Her armour was covered in it, blackening the grey steel. "I like the Master Chief. He is strong."

"Strength does not make a good leader," Garen said. He raised a hand to stop Kolminye from adding anything. "But the Master Chief is strong as well as wise. His plan has merit."

"And it is not like Ionia will remain peaceful for long," Xin Zhao added in. He was standing in the shadowy corner of the room, almost hidden. He had barely spoken, only adding in small pieces of useful information.

"Does it matter what those flower-lovers do?" Tryndamere asked. He and been caught in the explosion, too, but had suffered nothing for it. Apparently, he had shrugged off the wounds and charged into the bowels of the palace, ripping apart the saboteurs in his fury. Apparently his fury had not worn off, either; he was fidgeting constantly with his sword.

"It matters greatly," Jarvan said. "They are strong, whether we want to admit it or not. They just hide it behind their elegance."

"But their uses are limited in this scenario," Kolminye said.

"Don't treat this like one of your league matches," Lux said, suddenly and unexpectedly serious. "This is not the Institute of

War."

"I agree," Sejuani said with a nod. "Regardless of their alignment, they cannot stay neutral for long. If half the stuff I have heard about their vaults are true, then they will be attacked before you or I can swing a flail."

"Runes," Kolminye muttered. "It always comes down to Runes."

"Rune ownership aside," Xin Zhao said, "We need them, if only to protect what they have. And in reality, none of us here have the influence to get them to help us."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Tryndamere asked, looking fierce in the low light of the room.

"It means they do not care for politics at this stage in the game," Jarvan said. "They are neutral, and therefor will not parlay with us on the basis of our city-states. They will talk with someone who gets results, however."

"So it all comes back to the Master Chief," Kolminye said coolly.

"Hell yeah it does," Sejuani growled out. "He's the strongest, and he's war leader now. Deal with it." She paused. "Are we done here yet? I want to smash something in. preferably a skull."

* * *

><p>I was so super swamped with stuff this month, it was almost funny.

Almost.

Sorry if this chapter is kind of lacklustre, but being pressed for time never helps.I'll try and get another one up faster.

42. Chapter 42

Chapter 42: Ladies Like Armour Plating

The Master Chief reloaded his assault rifle, satisfied once he heard the magazine clack home. He stood upon a mound of broken rangers, each on having died while charging the super-soldier.

The Chief was currently in a small town, similar to the town he had been to at the start of this war, but visually different. Its proximity to Noxus seemed to have influenced building design. Regardless of the differences, this village suffered the same fate as the first, and the same as the last three the Chief had been to: mech occupation. The automaton army seemed to have taken advantage of the siege to occupy Noxian land, and had stationed garrisons in most of the along the allied armies' path.

Needless to say, the Chief had the army liberate every township they passed. Civilians and militia were alive in most of them, and the grateful people showered gifts upon their liberators.

The Chief had declined all of them, although he knew the soldiers had not. Noxian soldiers in particular.

The two armies — that of the Noxus and that of the Demacia — were getting along better than expected, but it was still a strenuous relationship. Conflicts broke out periodically, but most ended without injury.

"We have secured this township," the Noxian Lieutenant Mobley reported, disdain clear in his voice.

The Chief did not care about the personal feelings of the soldiers when it came to these matters. Most of them only cared about battle so long as it offered some sort of personal gain, and the Chief found that irrelevant. "Move your soldiers back into formation. We keep moving."

"It would be better if we allowed the soldiers to experience the joys of this township," Mobley said vaguely.

The Chief stared at him for a moment. He understood that, in order to keep his command of the army, he needed to cooperate fully with the highest-ranking officers and generals. The only problem was, most of the high-ranking officers were selfish. The Chief had been raised to eliminate selfishness, and so found the idea difficult to relate to.

Mobley backed down from the Spartan's glare. "Back in formation. Got it."

The Chief turned his attention back to the main road. He had only taken a portion of the army, and most of it was still camped outside. Jarvan IV and General Darius both allowed him to lead the soldiers by himself, since the both of them seemed to be at a perpetually on-edge around each other, and would never leave the other with the greater portion of the troops.

"At least it's better than having Swain here," the Chief mused. The Noxian Grand General would have slowed down the progress of the army considerably. Instead, the Grand General had left Darius in charge, as well as the two assassins.

The allied soldiers began to move out of the township, flowing past the Chief in thin ranks. Civilians were crowded around the doors of their homes, some clutching makeshift weapons in their hands. They stared with wide-eyes, some cheering, some crying.

The Chief stepped off the mound of bodies. He would have to leave the bodies to be policed by local authorities, or whatever passed for them here. He did not want to waste more time than necessary, and policing bodies would take far too much time. He knew Viktor would complain about that, though. He had on the previous three occasions. Despite professing his undying hatred for Professor Stanwick, he was oddly interested in his creations.

"Chief," Cortana said aloud, "why don't you wave to the crowds? Look, they love you."

The Chief looked to the throng of civilians which had, indeed, grown thicker.

He shrugged.

"Wow," Cortana exclaimed. "Such a people person."

Some of the Demacian soldiers who passed by snickered. The bickering between them was common, and the soldiers seemed to find it highly amusing. At least, that was the excuse Cortana gave every time he told her to stop.

The Chief began to walk alongside the troops, and the Civilians began to cheer.

It started slowly at first, but slowly rose in volume. The allied soldiers seemed to be enjoying the cheering, and some raised their weapon in triumph.

People began to thrust their hands out, trying desperately to touch the armour of their saviors.

The Chief unconsciously flinched away from the contact, the hands missing him by fingers pans.

"Great way to raise moral, Chief," Cortana noted.

The Chief shook his head and moved back where he was, lowering his shields down. People began to brush hands against his armour, feeling its pitted and foreign plates.

It didn't take long for their cheers to turn into shouts of 'Chief! Chief! Chief!'

* * *

><p>The march continued, as it always did. Because the majority of the army was footslogging, it was far slower going than it would have been on horses. Despite that, they went relatively unchallenged. The Chief had troops on horseback riding along the edges of the column, watching for threats, while Viktor's pelican patrolled overhead.<p>

It took them near a week to reach the port-town near Noxus, and the Chief had the entire army camp just outside the city proper.

"Who is going?" Jarvan IV asked on the evening they set up camp. It had been hotly debated how they planned to reach Ionia, since there was no way an entire army would be allowed to march onto their soil. In the end, the war-leaders had decided to take the pelican across the ocean and land on their soil, seeking an audience with their government. The only problem was deciding who would go.

The Chief had thought for some length of time who would accompany him on the troop-transport. Blue team and Kolminye were a given, but the rest were rather hazy. In the end, the Chief had just decided on allowing a representative from each faction to come along with him. Since Jarvan and Darius would not allow either to go, they each sent proxies on their behalf: Garen for Demacia, and Katarina for Noxus. Chief decided on Tryndamere from the Freljord, since he said he was on relatively good terms with the Ionians.

Really, the Chief was not reassured at all, but he did not have much variety at the moment.

The pelican was due to set off the morning after camp was made, and the entire diplomatic party boarded the transport.

Just before Riven climbed aboard, the Chief brought her aside.

"Will you be fine in Ionia?" he asked her. "And Yasuo?" he added after.

She tilted her head. "I'll be fine. Obviously."

The Chief nodded once, satisfied. "Understood."

He allowed her to board the transport and strap in, and climbed in after her. Chief stayed at the door, mag-locking his boots to the hull and aiming out the open hatch with his assault rifle. He knew it was a little unnecessary, but there was a chance of enemy pelicans attacking and so wanted to have eyes on the rear.

Graves was uneasy the entire lift-off. "Can we close the back, mate?" he asked, his shotgun rattling by his feet.

"Don't like the free wind?" Yasuo exclaimed, his face tilted to the open hatch.

"Shut up," Graves hissed, trying to look away from the back.

"It's soooo great," Yasuo drawled, clearly trying to annoy the shotgunner.

"You can't shoot a rifle."

Yauso shut up.

There was silence for several long moments.

"Allow me to do the talking once we reach them," Kolminye commanded.

"Why, think you can talk better than us?" Tryndamere challenged, a smile on his lips.

Kolminye matched his smile with one of her own. "Yes, I can definitely talk better than you. I am not the barbarian here."

Tryndamere bristled at the thinly-veiled insult.

Katarina snorted from the back of the pelican.

"This is just going great," Riven said sarcastically, and the Chief felt inclined to agree with her.

The pelican flew over the clear blue water, the powerful thrusters leaving wide trails in the water despite its height.

Clouds of strange birds flew past the vehicle, more frightened than curious towards the large object in their territory. The Chief let

them be at the behest of Cortana. There was no point in wasting ammunition scaring them off. Still, he warned Viktor over the comm to steer clear and make sure none got near the engines. Staling over the middle of the ocean was not in the Chief's goal plan.

It took over an hour for the pelican to reach the Ionian port. The Chief made sure to have Viktor slow down a kilometer out from the island-nation, just in case they thought they were an enemy.

The pelican slowly hovered over the port, casting a shadow across the ground. Ionian workers stood in shock, some running for the nearest cover possible.

"We need permission to land," Chief said to no one in particular.

Almost immediately there was a loud static noise as the loudspeakers mounted on the pelican activated.

"PEOPLE OF IONIA," Viktor announced, "WE WOULD LIKE TO LAND."

"Well," Thresh said in melodic voice, "you have successfully succeeded in scaring away the rest of the port town."

It took a further twenty minutes before they had permission to land.

A large contingent of guards appeared on the scene, each one moving swiftly and professionally to surround the descending aircraft.

The Chief mag-locked his assault rifle to his back and kept his hands at his side, and made sure everyone else in the party did the same. No point in antagonizing their hosts.

The pelican took another five minutes to land, Viktor slowly winding down the engines. The Chief walked off the ramp the moment of touchdown, striding forwards with sure steps.

Kolminye quickly overtook the Chief, vying to be the first person to make contact with the Ionians. The rest of the group filed out, Viktor being the last on to leave the drop ship.

The guards swiftly surrounded the group, each one holding elegant longrifles with their muzzles pointed upwards. A red armoured guard stood at their center, obviously their leader. She bore no firearm, only several blades sheathed on her back.

The High Councilor made to move forwards towards the red armoured guard. "Irelia, how good to see you again. We have come on â€"

She was cut short as another guard leveled their rifle at her head.

The Chief had his pistol out and aimed in an instant. There was a time for calm and a time for action, and threatening a member of his party â€" that required lethal action.

He did not fire, though. He recognized the person in the red armour, Irelia. He recalled her stopping him on the stairs of the institute,

talking to him about something. The exact details he could not recall, since he had not deemed it important at the time. Now, he sort of wished he did.

Kolminye looked back to the Chief, and then back towards their captor. "We mean no harm," she said. "We just want-"

"We know why you are here," Ireliia said in her clipped voice. "It has been foreseen."

The High Councilor blinked.

"And we have no interest in speaking with you. We only wish to speak with the Spartan," Ireliia finished.

Kolminye blinked again.

"What?" Cortana asked aloud, earning sharp, confused glances from the assembled guards.

The Chief flipped on the safety of his magnum and locked it to his leg armour. He nodded towards Ireliia, to show he agreed with what she said.

Kolminye was somewhat less than pleased. "I believe I am better for the negotiations, Chief."

"He is the person our leaders wish to speak to. I cannot allow anyone else." Ireliia spoke firmly, to stop any further protests.

"Hey, think you can have your guys stop aiming weapons at us?"

Chief turned, looking to find Yasuo. True to the Ronin's word, Riven, Katarina and he were surrounded by four guards with their weapons raised.

Katarina seemed bored, idly adjusting her leather vest. Yasuo had a large grin on his face, his right hand twitching towards his sheathed katana. Riven was impassive, as only a soldier could be.

"Their presence may cause trouble," Ireliia said, gesturing with a tilt of her head, "and so I wonder as to why they were brought here in the first place."

"I won't cause trouble for anyone if they don't cause trouble for me," Yasuo said.

"They won't cause trouble," Chief reassured without a backwards glance.

There was a pause several minutes long. Perhaps Ireliia was trying to ascertain the validity of the Chief's claim, or maybe she was simply reluctant, but in the end she had her guardsmen stand down.

"Follow," she said, turning on her heel.

The group did as it was told, but not without some rumbling, particularly on the part of Kolminye. The guards filed in around the group, boxing them in without making it seem so. The Chief thought it

clever, yet pointless. It was highly unlikely that they would be able to stop the group, should the need for violence arise. Ireliia may prove to be a challenge, though.

They walked through the harbor town in to time at all. The harbor-town they had landed in was tiny, nothing more than a collection of straw homes and storehouses. Nearer to the back there were cobblestone towers and low stone walls, each one raggedy and make-shift in appearance. The fortifications were evidence of the former battles that had taken place in this area, and it seemed that they were not even worth repairing.

The Chief let curiosity get the better of him and he glanced back, just to observe the reactions of his companions. Katarina marched passed the rubble with an air of indifference, while Riven glanced at them briefly before looking away. Cortana thought Yasuo looked annoyed, but the Chief wasn't so sure it was annoyance.

The group continued on. The Chief glanced around periodically, trying to find what vehicle or mount the guards used to reach the village. He did not find one, however. It only made him more curious as to how the troops had repositioned so fast.

"You have all decided to join us at quite an auspicious time," Ireliia said conversationally.

The Chief did not respond. Instead, he found himself looking at the Ionian countryside. The trees were red and yellow and curved in interesting ways, lending the landscape an almost ethereal look. There was almost no evidence of human civilization, which was almost shocking in and of itself. In the UNSC, fertile land like this would be quickly industrialized.

Cortana was paying more attention than the Chief was, so she responded for him. "Why would that be?"

If Ireliia was unnerved by the disembodied female voice, she did not show it. Instead, she waved out her hand and said, "You have arrived at the time of the lunar revel."

"Lunar revel," Yasuo said at the exact same moment. He started grumbling immediately after words.

"It is a festival of the moon and the new year," Ireliia said, ignoring the Ronin. "And a time where fortunes and prophesies are at their highest point."

"Mystic mumbo jumbo," Katarina mumbled under her breath.

"There will be much celebrating in the capital," Ireliia said, before hesitating for a moment. "If you reach there."

There was a tense moment, the only sounds being the feet of the group as they marched over cobblestone and fallen leaves.

"What does that mean, exactly?" Kolminye inquired her hands in her robes. The Chief assumed she was hiding them so as to prepare her magic, or whatever it was Summoners fought with.

A little belatedly the Chief realized he had never actually seen a

Summoner in actual combat. That made him unsure; he wanted to have all information possible for any possible scenario that might occur. Otherwise, how could he possibly formulate a battle-plan without knowing the strengths of his own team?

"You will be questioned just outside the city, in one of our meeting chambers. There we will decide if you shall stay, or go." Irelia said it all passively, but her precise, stiff movements betrayed her true thoughts on the matter.

There was another silence, longer than the last.

"Will there be fighting?" Tryndamere asked suddenly, his voice hopeful.

"Ah â€" no," Irelia stammered out. "Hopefully not."

"That takes the fun out of thingsâ€|" Tryndamere said to the side.

"No fighting," Chief said with a sharp glance. Somehow the Chief knew it was going to be a long walk from there on out.

They had walked for a further half hour, passing by several townships as they did so. Some bore the scars of battle, but for the most part everything seemed relatively intact. The group only stopped when they came within view of the Ionian capital city.

From a distance, they could see the multi-tiered towers and ivory buildings that made up the city, but all the structures were shadowed by a large temple-like structure in the center. Trees lined the way up to the city.

What the Chief found most interesting was the lack of walls. While there were towers and low walls, there were nothing like the tall walls that surrounded Demacia of Noxus. It made the city look almost peaceful, and that was something that the Chief had been distinctly lacking from his life. It almost came as a shock that people still lived in peacefulness.

"Come," Irelia said, waving the group to a side path. The Chief allowed his group to follow first. He watched the city for a few more minutes before turning away and following them down the path.

The group had only managed to advance a handful of steps up the path, so the Chief had no trouble at all catching up. They seemed to be ascending the hillside, and the path became more treacherous the further up they went.

The vegetation changed as they climbed also. Gone were the curving red and yellow trees, replaced by low shrubs and tall grasses. Rocks were more prominent, and some were large enough to hide several people behind. The Chief made sure Cortana scanned each one for any heat signatures, just in case.

The climbed even further upwards, the path forever winding. The Chief found it faintly odd that there were no guards upon the path, but there wasn't any point in wondering too hard. Runeterra was filled with strange things, as they Chief had learned to his annoyance.

The group finally crested the top of the tall hill, reaching a gleaming structure that sat proudly on top. It was made of white marble inlaid with rich wooden panels, all assembled to make a low house. Small pools surrounded the structure, small fountains trickling water into them.

"Enter, please," Ireliia said, stopping at the end of the path. Her guards moved from their positions for the first time since they had set out, moving to positions that seemed pre-designated.

The Chief stood still as the rest of the group started forwards.

"That was directed towards the Master Chief," Ireliia clarified before the group reached the single paneled door.

Katarina turned around and scoffed. "What does that mean?"

"That means only the Master Chief can enter," Ireliia said deadpanned. "Especially not an assassin like you."

"Oh, now that was an insult," Katarina said.

"Don't," Chief warned. He stepped forwards towards the door.

"I didn't even do anything yet!" Katarina protested.

"Eh, you'll get used to it," Yasuo said, yawning. "He does it often."

"You know I'm not letting you go inside alone," Kolminye said flatly.

"Then come in," Chief told her.

"I will."

"Okay." The Chief resumed walking to the door. Kolminye caught up with swift strides, so dignified to run after the larger man.

The Chief slid opened the paneled door, and stepped inside once the gap was large enough for him to slip through. The High Councilor slipped in after him.

"Ah, Master Chief," a voice called out, "sit down, I was just having some tea."

The room they entered was not very large, but cozy-looking despite that. There was a large table that appeared to be mahogany, with several seats arranged around it. Only one seat was occupied.

"Karma?" Kolminye stepped forwards.

The woman occupying the chair rose up, offering her hand as she did so. "High Councilor, how wonderful."

"That it is," Kolminye said, grasping the hand before sitting down across from the darker woman. "Tea, is it? What kind?"

"Cycbal, of course," Karma said as she poured the steaming liquid into three cups. "I hope it is to your liking."

"Naturally it is," the High Councilor responded.

"Lady Karma," the Chief began.

"Sit down, please. And just call me Karma." She pushed a cup of warm liquid closer to the Chief's end of the table.

"Karma," the Chief repeated without making any attempt to sit. "We have come to ask for your help â€" "

"Chief, really. You need to act civilized," Kolminye commented as she sipped her tea.

"â€|I can't believe she just said that," Cortana noted over the private comm channel.

"War stops for no one," Chief responded, but nonetheless did not continue his earlier statement. He allowed the two women to talk, each one speaking of things that were common to heads-of-state. Each of the topics strayed away from the topic they had come there to discuss.

"..of course, I had them ship the stuff back once I learned what it was," Karma was saying.

"I would have done the same thing." Kolminye nodded her head.

"We don't have time," Chief interrupted.

"Well, that was rude," Cortana noted privately. Chief ignored her.

"Of course we do not," Karma said, sipping the last of her tea. She set her cup beside the Chief's, which had already gone cold. "You are here to ask for assistance, yes?"

The Chief nodded his head.

"This is something that I have known would happen for a long while. This is also something I have given a lot of thought."

"Is that a yes, dear Karma?" Kolminye inquired.

"That is a conditional yes," Karma said.

"Score," Cortana shouted gleefully. The Chief was forced to lower his comm volume in response.

"Unfortunately, I am not the only person in charge here. I cannot, with any real certainty, say the rest of the country will agree. This is a democracy, after all."

The Chief tilted his head.

"In three days' time, the council will convene. I will give you full support, but you must convince them too."

"Understood."

"It does not help that you brought along two Noxians and the exiled ronin, however," Karma noted. She gathered Kolminye's empty cup with the other two and stood up.

"We will make sure they do nothing in any way to incite the people against us," Kolminye assured.

Karma nodded twice. "You will have quarters just out of the city, for ease. You can, of course, enter the city at any time. This is just for protection."

"You anticipate violence?" Kolminye asked.

"I anticipate idiots," Karma explained. She glanced at a clock on her wall. "Well, this has been most enlightening, but I cannot entertain you for any longer. I have previous commitments to attend to now."

"Of course," the High Councilor said, bowing at the waist. "Thank you for your time."

The Chief thanked her, too, but did not bow. There was not was his armour would allow that, even if he wanted to, which he did not.

"Oh, one more thing," Karma called out. "Your exile is allowed to visit the place."

Chief shook his head. " I don't " " " "

"Don't worry, you will." She waved her hand. "See you in three days."

* * *

><p>Everyone was pretty much exactly how the Chief had left them. The guards remained stock-still, the diplomatic party was standing around, and everyone seemed impassive.<p>

Irelia tilted her head. "I trust everything went well."

"Yes, quite," Kolminye responded amiably.

"If you would all follow me, I can take you to your residence for the remainder of your visitation," Irelia continued on to say. Her guards moved back into formation, subtly boxing the group in again.

"Huh," Graves said. "Hope I's a nice house."

"Eh, don't expect much," Yasuo told him, earning him a few sharp glances from the guards.

"Actually," Riven spoke up, "I would like to visit the place."

Irelia turned to stare at the Exile. Riven stared back.

The Chief cleared his throat. "I was told she had permission to

go."

Irelia continued to stare the other woman down. It took several minutes before she relented, nodding her assent to her request.

"Lead everyone down the mountain," the Chief told the Ionian Captain of the Guard. "I'll head out with Riven."

Irelia's mouth twitched. "Understood."

"You shouldn't â€" " Riven tried to start, but she was interrupted by Cortana.

"Don't bother," she said, "he's far too stubborn."

"Then let's go," Riven muttered. "We have a lot of ground to cover."

* * *

><p>It took them easily an hour to reach the area. It wasn't that the place had been hard to reach rather, it was so different from the last time Riven had seen it that she could not find it again. But she did, eventually.<p>

It was a sort of like a valley, with large rocks and scatterings of other unidentifiable objects. Grass covered the valley floor, but it was unlike the lush tall grass that covered the rest of Ionia. It was shorter and, in certain places, brown with death.

Structures were evident, too, but they looked to have been abandoned years ago. Most were buried into the ground, with mud and vegetation covering them.

Riven walked forwards into the valley. The Chief stayed a respectful distance behind, one hand on his magnum. He scanned the area with his eyes, watching out for potential hostiles. His foot crunched against something, and he looked down sharply.

He lifted his foot, and stared at the object that he had unknowingly crushed. It was a sword, elegantly curved and tapered towards the end. Clearly it had been buried for a long while, as it was rusting and brittle.

The Chief looked up. Cortana automatically scanned the area, and the Chief's visor was highlighted with dozens of blue outlines. Each one resembled a weapon, or piece of armour. Each and everyone looked buried, each evidence that they had been there for quite a while.

The Chief moved up to Riven, who had stopped in the center of the valley.

"What is this place?" he asked as he neared her.

Riven didn't answer. She simply sat down, drew up her knees, and wrapped her arms around them.

The Chief stayed standing. He looked up, and saw that the sun was

about to dip beneath the horizon line. He did not want to stay out at night, but also did not want to force Riven to leave when they had just arrived.

"This is â€" was â€" a battlefield," Riven said as she stared into the sky.

The Chief looked down at her.

"This wasâ€|uhâ€| where I fought. For the last time. During the Ionian war."

The Chief looked around. _That explains the weapons, _he thought.

She waved her hand in the general direction the broken structures. "That was where I was when the bombardment happened."

Chief recalled Riven telling him about a chemical bombing during the battle. That, too, would explain the difference in vegetation between the valley and rest of Ionia.

"My company, fury company, was around me at the time," Riven explained. "I was in cover at the time, fighting against an Ionian champion." She shook her head sadly. "I never got his name."

"Then the shooting began. We had been told to push up, but it was only so that the war machines had targets to hit." She pointed to a hill several yards away. "That was where the first bombs landed, and I knew something was wrong. I ordered my company to run up. At that point, Ionians and Noxians were running side-by-side through the chemical carnage."

She sighed. "I didn't work. I remember slipping on someone, and some missile missed me and hit just ahead. I tried to turn back, see if I could salvage fury company, but the smoke was so thick I could not see anything but death. I ran east, and by the time I emerged from the battlefield, everything was already dead."

The Chief shook his head. "I don't understand. Why would Noxian's shoot upon their own?"

She gave a harsh laugh. "I don't know. They probably just wanted to test out their new toys. Sometimes I'm glad they lost."

The Chief sat down beside Riven. His armour made it difficult, but he was able to stretch out his legs and brace himself upon his forearms. "It's over now," he said. "Better now."

The sun finally set, making a beautiful, bright, orange glow.

Riven looked over. "Chiefâ€|"

Chief shifted. He reached under him and grabbed a piece of armour that he had inadvertantly sat upon. He tossed it away. "I should have looked more carefully," he lamented.

Riven blinked.

"Sigh," Cortana said aloud. "Men."

"Men," Riven agreed.

"¿what?" The Master Chief asked, perplexed.

"Shhh, Chief," Cortana hushed. "Don't ruin it any further."

So they sat there, watching the sun go down completely.

* * *

<p>Elsewhere

Marin tapped his foot against the metal grating. He tossed the flat case upon the desk, waiting for his employer to open it.

His employer did not. He gazed at it, and merely nodded, satisfied.

"I had assumed it would have taken you longer to retrieve the rune form Shurima," Stanwick said, "considering its guardians."

"Child's play," Marin responded. He shifted his stance.

The employer nodded a dismissal, and returned to writing notes down upon a piece of paper.

Marin did not move, instead opting to continue tapping his foot against the floor.

Professor Stanwick did not look up, not until he finally finished covering the piece of paper with small, precise script. "You are still here." A statement, not a question.

"Yes."

Stanwick stared Marin down. "You have never been this insolent. What happened?"

"I died."

"Yes," Stanwick chuckled, "that you did."

"The Master Chief. What do we intend to do?"

"You really don't like him," Stanwick noted.

"He is dangerous."

"He is mildly more troublesome than expected."

"He is their warmaster," Marin said. "This will be a big problem."

"The last stage of the plan is ready. He cannot beat the final push."

"Are you so sure?" Marin looked to the side.

"The pieces you are collecting ensure that we will win, regardless."

Do not fear."

"Stillâ€|" Marin hesitated.

Professor Stanwick sighed. He pushed himself away from his desk. "My assistants - weak though they are â€" are getting the final piece of the puzzle now. And, if what I think is true, then a nice little present will be left for our super-soldier. I very much doubt he will be able to deal with it."

"Understood." Marin shifted from foot to foot. "No innocents will be harmed in this final apln, yes?"

"Of course." Stanwick smiled thinly. "As per you contract."

"Good." Marin turned away.

"Most people would just have asked for more money, you know."

"I am not most people. I have honour." Marin took a step.

Stanwick laughed, loud and clear and cold as ice. Marin waited for a moment for it subside, but it did not.

He left the room. He could still hear his employer laugh, though.

43. Chapter 43

Chapter 43: Midnight

* * *

><p>"No."<p>

"Is that your final answer?" High Councilor Kolminye asked hesitantly.

"Yes," another of the councilors confirmed.

"We need your army," the Master Chief cut in.

The Spartan and the High Councilor were both in council with the leaders of Ionia, in one of their largest buildings in their city. They had been there for close to five hours, and nothing had been achieved. Three out of the four councilors refused to send their army out, while Karma tried to convince them otherwise. It really did not seem to be working.

"The best interests of our nations are contrary to that of yours," one of the politicians said.

"Our interests are for the entire continent â€" " Kolminye tried to say.

"But the interests of the entire continent are not ours," the third politician cut in.

"That is insane," Karma insisted. "How can our interests be different

than that of the rest of the known world?"

"We are a peace-keeping country," the first said, "And we cannot jeopardize that on vague hunches of war."

"There is a war going on. What will you do when they march right up to your doorstep?" Kolminye asked. "This has happened before, as I hope you realize."

Three out of the four diplomats grimaced at the reminder. "We will deal with that if it comes to that."

Karma sighed theatrically and covered her face with one hand.

"So this your final decision?" Kolminye asked.

The politicians all looked at each other. "By an overwhelming vote of 3-1, yes."

"I see," Kolminye said gravely.

The Chief wanted nothing more than to sigh, but knew he should not. The entire meeting seemed to have been pointless. _I got more done fighting than politicking_, he mused.

Suddenly, the doors of the chamber flew open. A gust of thick wind swept through the room, blowing papers and curtains around.

"How could you have called a meeting without your sovereign's knowledge?" the new comer asked.

The third politician shook his head. "Syndra, must we remind you that you are not in charge of Ionia?"

Syndra tossed back her head and laughed. "I am the most powerful" "

"Syndra," Kolminye greeted with false warmth, "how wonderful to see you."

Syndra turned and seemed to realize who the speaker was. "High Councilor. Did you agree to meet without me, too?"

"Ah not at all," Kolminye said amiably. "I insisted we wait for you before we started."

Two of the councilmembers gave her withering looks.

Syndra nodded, seemingly satisfied with the response. She turned to face the council once more. "I order us to aid them in their quest."

"You order us?" Karma inquired with a raised eyebrow and a smirk.

"It is my right as our rightful ruler," Syndra insisted.

The Chief shook his head. Nothing was making sense at all. He honestly preferred fighting over this. He definitely was not cut out for this.

he turned to the High Councilor and tapped her on the shoulder. "May I take my leave?"

"Youâ€¦ want toâ€¦ go?" Kolminye asked in apparent disbelief.

"I wish to leave, yes. I believe you can handle this on your own," Chief said with confidence.

Apparently, that was what the High Councilor wanted to hear, so she nodded her assent.

It ended up being fairly easy for the Chief to sneak out, despite his massive size. Everyone was so focused on arguing with each other that they paid no heed to the armoured man leaving through the only door.

He had to contend with the long staircase before he could exit the building. While it posed to difficulty for the super-soldier, he could only wonder why the Ionians felt the need to build a five-story high winding staircase.

He exited the tower, and found his group exactly as he had left them. Everyone but Viktor was there, him being too preoccupied with his pelican to actually show up.

"How did it go?" Yasuo asked, trying his hardest to avoid looking at the Ionian government building.

"Useless," Chief replied.

"So it's a no-go on the army, then," Katarina stated with an indignant air.

The Chief frowned beneath his helmet. He was not sure what her agenda was at all, but he was certain she meant the alliance no ill-will. Still, it would not do good to let her do what she wanted.

"It's a no-go," the Chief confirmed. "Everyone, head bac to the barracks and pack up."

"Butâ€¦ We jus' got here," Graves told him.

"Yes. I expect we will be leaving soon, too," the Chief responded.

Graves blinked.

Cortana chose that moment to speak, but was careful to only use the inner helmet channel. Even she knew, in her depleted state, not to voice dissent where the team could hear. "Chief, it's probably a good idea to stay for a bit."

"Stay? But we are no longer needed here."

"Yeah, but you've been marching them nearly nonstop forâ€¦ well, since before you got me back. They kinda need a break."

The Chief hesitated for a moment. It wasn't the life of a soldier to get breaks, to want rest when there was a job that needed doing.

He had to remind himself that they were not soldiers, not really. They fought well enough, but they did not have the same drive the Chief did.

Then again, he doubted anyone did. Not anymore, at least.

"Fine," the Spartan relented, "You guys can sightsee. By nightfall, all of you must be at the barracks."

"A day of wandering? Great," Yasuo said half-heartedly.

"Don't worry," Graves threw an arm around the wanderer, "I got ya'. I'll show you a great time."

"You know, I can't say I trust those two," Cortana said aloud, earning her laughs from the remaining members. The Chief almost envied Cortana for that ability.

Almost.

Katarina examined her nails and huffed. "I guess I'll get going too."

Thresh immediately followed after her.

"What do you think you're doing?" she demanded caustically.

Thresh shrugged, an oddly ethereal and strangely revolting gesture. "Wherever your go, souls show up."

The two of them left the area soon after.

Tryndamere looked around aimlessly, seemingly out of tune with the rest of the group. "Yeah.. I'm gunna just go... uh... hit things with my sword." He gestured to the massive claymore strapped to his back. "This sword." He walked away.

The Chief had to shake his head at that one.

"Soâ€¦ Where are we going?" Riven asked nonchalantly.

The Chief looked down at her, the only remaining blue team member. She was dressed casually, wearing civilian clothing instead of her usual semi-armoured attire. Her sword was strapped to her back, the weight most likely too much to bear on one hip.

"We're going nowhere," Chief stated after a long moment. "I want to walk alone."

"You don't â€" Why? What's wrong?" Riven looked concerned.

"I â€" nothing," the Chief said with a frown, before remembering she could not see his face. He shook his head to emphasize his words.

Perhaps that gave off the wrong sign, Chief thought when Riven started to frown.

"I'm fine. I am just going to go exploring," he clarified for her

benefit.

She didn't seem satisfied at all, but relented nonetheless. She took her leave, backing away from the Spartan with swift steps.

"Here we are," Cortana said. "Alone."

The Chief slapped the side of his helmet and started to walk.

The city was set in the flatland between three natural hills, so the city was built to accommodate those natural features in its design. The streets were sometimes flat and sometimes winding, and buildings could be found on flat ground and tilted ground alike. Despite all this, it was organized, much unlike the other cities the Chief had seen. Evidence of thought and pre-planning was evident in every corner, tilted building and slanted walkway.

"It is graceful in its own sort of way," the Chief concluded.

He also had to admit that the city bore a strange resemblance to the Noxus, but decided it was better not to tell that to the Ionians. They all seemed to still nurse sore wounds from the Noxian/Ionian conflict that had swept these lands so many years before.

The city seemed no worse for wear, despite past events. Maybe the Ionians had just tried really hard to hide the worst of the battle, or maybe the conflict had never reached this point, but it did not seem the city cared either way. People moved about happily in riots of colour, talking and laughing and song everywhere the Chief could see.

"This is nice," Cortana observed as the music of a passing band reached them.

"It's loud," Chief replied.

"Oh, don't be such a worrier."

The Chief chose to walk up a pathway that led higher up the hill top. He tried to stay on the most populated roads, thinking that if any attack came, like the one in the Institute city, the assailant would be deterred by the crowds of people.

As a result, though, there were more people to stare at the Chief as he passed by. Evidently, the Institute matches seemed to be just as popular here as they were "well, everywhere else. Everyone knew him, and that got him frantic glances and admiring stares.

"Wandering the city?"

Chief turned. "Irelia," he greeted.

"It's a wonderful city, is it not?" the Ionian captain of the guard inquired.

The Chief only nodded, unsure of the correct answer to the posed question. Irelia seemed to be alone, with none of her usual guards around her.

Irelia walked ahead of the Chief, and he followed her as she moved.

"Did you get bored of the meeting?" she asked over her shoulder suddenly.

"Nothing productive was happening," the Chief said passively. In truth, he had been bored, but it was not that important. At least, not important enough to tell another Ionian about.

He wondered how the High Councilor was handling everything back in the diplomatic chambers. Civilly, he hoped.

"Have you tried any of our delicacies?" Irelia inquired as they passed by a road-side food vendor.

"Not to my taste," the Chief.

"Hah," Cortana laughed. "You haven't tasted a single thing 'cuz you're worried about 'negative effects to your metabolism'."

"Cortana," the Chief warned.

Irelia smiled. "I have been meaning to ask you, who is the other voice?"

"You mean the great and awesome me?" Cortana said.

"My partner," the Chief replied. "Recently reunited, soon-to-be scrap metal."

Cortana immediately stopped talking.

"Your technological prowess never ceases to amaze me," Irelia admitted.

The Chief shrugged in response. It was not like she had seen the half of what he used to wage war with.

The two stayed silent for several long minutes.

"You know," Irelia began, "I really did want our army to join yours. I was really looking forward to fighting alongside you." She gave the Chief a sidelong glance. "Our peace won't last forever."

As if to reinforce Irelia's words, on perhaps in direct response to them, a glow lit the top of the hill. Irelia, upon noticing the glow reflected by the Chief's visor, turned lighting fast.

The glow was harsh, and growing brighter by the second.

"Fire," Irelia said instinctively at once. She began moving fast, running up the path that led to the top.

The Chief followed, because for him, fire indicated danger, and danger indicated enemies.

The further up they got, the more crowded things became. People were moving down from the hilltop, not quite in a rush but less than

calmly.

"This isn't looking good," Irelia muttered.

The Chief was inclined to agree. Most of the Ionian city was wood, so a blaze like the one up ahead could set several blocks alight.

"Captain!" three guardsmen in red Ionian uniforms clambered down the steps.

"Report," Irelia said curtly.

"There is a fire at the temple," the highest-ranking one said. "It's bad, but it's entirely stoppable" "

"The temple?" Irelia frowned. "What's wrong with the temple?"

"The, ah" the guardsmen exchanged looks. "The fires started from there."

Irelia stiffened and ground her teeth together. "You two, come with us. you, go alert the rest of the guard to come."

"The" the rest, ma'am? Everyone?" the last guardsman looked unsure.

"Yes, everyone. Quickly." She practically hissed the last word. As soon as left, Irelia marched right back up the steps, forcing a path through the now panicked crowd.

"What's wrong at the top?" the Chief had to ask her. Clearly something was seriously wrong, possibly dangerously so.

Irelia gave him a glance. "Nothing, hopefully."

"The temple?" Cortana pressed.

"The temple is an honorary thing," Irelia clarified. "It marks the spot where an ancient demon was banished."

The guardsmen paled.

"Will that cause any problems?" the Chief found himself asking. Before reaching Runeterra, magic and the supernatural had seemed like foreign creatures, fakes next to science and reason. However, the world around him was filled with magic, and he needed to factor that unstable element into his plans.

"Hopefully not," Irelia muttered.

"So reassuring," Cortana sighed.

They crested the hilltop. The fires were already attacking the nearest buildings, the fire viscous and all-consuming. The blaze was still in its infant phases, but it already looked like a fire twenty times its size.

Irelia turned to the two guards, and began to shoot out rapid-fire orders. "Get to the well, and begin filling buckets with water. You,

I want you to find any people still left up here and get them to safety. Those that wish to help put out the blaze may do so, but remind them they are under the guard's command."

Both guardsmen saluted and, after one final glance to the fire, moved off to their respective tasks.

Irelia faced the Chief. "We're going to search the temple."

"I see," Chief said. He allowed Irelia to lead the way, although it wasn't hard to find the temple at all.

It wasn't really a temple, at least not in the traditional sense. It was more like a shrine, a single doorway with gilded statues pressing against from either side. It was standing in a courtyard with murals set into the ground, each depicting some great, ancient battle.

However, what drew the eye was the thing resting in the doorway, if resting was the word that could be used. A shimmering sheet of silver light was suspended, filling the entire length of the door like some gateway to another place.

It reminded the Chief of the teleportation system in the Halo rings.

"That can't be good at all," Cortana said.

"Yes, that is not supposed to be happening," Irelia confirmed. She took a step closer.

Immediately the fire shifted direction, as if a strong wind had instantaneously made it burn another way. From all sides, the fire flickered towards the pair.

"â€|I'm going to go out on a hunch here and say that's not fire," Cortana half-whispered.

"That would be an incredible assumption!" Irelia cried out as a tendril of flame launched towards her. The blades strapped to her back ripped free of their confinement and lashed out, slicing through the red flame in four precise spots.

The tendril disappeared, as if the magic conjuring it had vanished.

"There's more on our six," Cortana said unnecessarily. The Chief's motion sensor was more than able to pick up the movement of the 'fire'.

The Chief drew his assault rifle, and took aim. Irelia brought her floating swords in front of her, and placed herself back-to-back with the Spartan.

"Worst case scenario?" Chief asked her.

"I would say so," she said quickly. Her head flicked towards the portal. "We need to clear a path towards that."

"Only one of us can go in," Chief replied. The tendrils of flame

snaked their way closer, each one resembling a fiery serpent more than they did an inferno.

"Whoever gets there first, then," Irelia concluded, and swung her swords down.

The Chief could not see if she killed her target or not, but that was unimportant. The Chief was assaulted at the same time by three of the tendrils, and concentrated on bringing each one down.

He fired a burst into the first, and watched as it shook in, possibly, pain. He switched fire to the second and fired a more concentrated burst into it, watching as it disintegrated into ash. The third got in too close for bullets, but the Chief grabbed it with his left hand and pulled.

The first tendril rose back up, the bullets having been insufficient to keep the creature down. It lashed out again, so the Chief was forced to fire one-handed. He emptied half his clip into the beast before it too disintegrated.

He turned his attention back to the third, and quickly crushed it into fine powder.

"Don't do that again," Cortana warned. "The fire was slowly draining your shields, and I'm not sure we'll have the time to recharge over here."

The Chief nodded his assent, and emptied the rest of his rifle into another two of the snaking beasts.

A floating sword sliced through a fiery tentacle on the Chief's right, first cutting the tip off, and then the main body on its turn-around pass.

Another lunged forwards, and the Chief was forced to body-tackle it in order to make enough space to reload. As it fell to the ground, already fading to dust, the Chief slid another magazine home and put down another rebellious flame.

The Chief took the time to turn around and see how Irelia was doing.

She was walking towards the portal-door, her blades spinning in arcs around her, bisecting anything that came close. Once and a while the four floating sword-shards would stab down together, impaling any of the larger fire snakes that managed to get close.

Deciding to take a hint from the Ionian captain of the guard, the Chief moved closer to the gate too.

Tendrils continued to lash out, and the Chief continued to put them down with sharp bursts from his AR. No matter how many he seemed to kill, there were always more to fill in the gaps. He decided it was possible the 'fire' was receding back into this pavilion, to stop the two invaders.

The thought wasn't very heartening.

A cluster of fire tentacles gathered up ahead, trying to impede the

Spartans response, the Chief prepped a plasma grenade and tossed it.

It detonated and, for a second, it seemed like it was effective. However, after a few seconds of wild flailing, the tentacles went back to their original state.

The Chief hesitated.

"They seem to be resistant to high-energy objects," Cortana noted. "Or maybe just heat."

The Chief shrugged and reached for a frag grenade. He looked at it in his hand for some seconds. He had barely any of the, and did not want to waste it " but grenades were meant to be used.

He tossed it, and this one had far more effect than the last. The tentacles were ripped apart by high-velocity shrapnel, turning them into ash at the instant of explosion.

He ran forwards.

Perhaps the demon creature got tired of losing the fight, or perhaps it was simply hungry for Spartan meat. The reason did not make much of a difference. All that mattered to the Chief was the massive tendril that reached out of the portal, magma sizzling across its skin.

The Chief braced himself.

The tentacle jabbed out suddenly, but the Chief was able to dodge out of the way just in time.

The tentacle tried to recover its momentum by swinging around wildly, perhaps hoping to catch its target in one of the wild arcs.

The Chief was one step ahead of it. He stayed low and fired his assault rifle on full auto, emptying an entire clip into the large appendages flanks.

The fiery snake-like beast seemed not to feel the bullets. It reared back up, and turned its spearhead-face back towards the super-soldier.

It dived once again, and the Chief rolled out of the way for a second time.

This time, however, the beast was quick. It immediately swung out to the left, catching the Chief just as he came up from his roll. It launched him back, nearly shattering his shields through the force of the impact.

It reared up again, and stabbed downwards.

The Chief rolled out of the way and the beast smashed through layers of cobblestone, before immediately recovered.

Another stab, and another dodge. This time, the Chief scrambled backwards to make room for himself.

The snake tried to swing at the Chief, hoping that the its target would be unable to avoid such a broad sweep.

It was wrong.

The Chief, having planned for this moment, stood stock-still. At the last possible second, just before impact, he swung downwards with both his fists.

His shields, which he had overcharged just moments before, detonated in a near-blinding flash of light. The static burst travelled through the tentacle, sending clouds of ash up from its large body. Pieces of its flesh flaked off, revealing the fiery core inside.

There was a loud moan from the beast, and it slowly retreated back to the portal.

The Chief took a step towards it, and then looked back.

"Irelia," he called out, getting the Ionian's attention, "I'm going in. You are on guard duty."

Irelia gave a smile. "How apt."

The Chief turned back and reloaded his rifle before jumping through the dimensional gateway.

* * *

><p>There was pain, bending, and the feeling of having traveled through an unimaginably long tunnel. It was quite unlike the feeling of going through a teleporter.<p>

When the black spots finally faded from his eyes, he found himself in a new place, quite unlike the city he had left behind. It was all just flat metal, stretching around and around.

There the massive tentacle was also there, the one that the Chief had fought only moments before. But that wasn't the only one. There were several, perhaps half a dozen, of the large appendages all floating high above the floor. They all seemed to originate from a single point, a bright ball of light, somewhere in the distance.

The Chief clutched his assault rifle and moved towards it.

Nothing happened as he walked across the flat metal. Nothing. He had expected the tentacles to resume their assault, now that their host was exposed, but they did nothing but wave ominously in the stale air.

Perhaps there were other defenses? The Chief wondered.

And suddenly, he was no longer there. Or rather, he was there, but nothing was like it had just been just a moment before. Instead of walking upon a sheet of metal, he was instead walking upon sandy dunes. Instead of massive tentacles high above his head, there were UNSC dreadnaughts fighting against Covenant cruisers.

"What?" Cortana seem confused. "We didn't go back home, did we?"

"No," the Chief said, warily scanning the dunes, "We're definitely not back home."

He started walking slowly forwards. He was not sure what magic was at play here, but he was not about to let it take him off-guard.

There was movement in one of the dunes.

The Chief didn't hesitate. Using the trickle of sand as a marker, he fired directly into the white mound. He was rewarded for his efforts with a roar of pain, and perhaps outrage. Not a moment later an Elite warrior burst out of the shifting sands.

That took the Chief aback for a moment. That, he had not been expecting. It was an Elite, a full-grown Sangheili soldier. It was covered in classic covenant officer armour, the colouration a heated red.

It roared a challenge towards him.

"I sense a red theme going on," Cortana noted as the Elite jumped at the Spartan.

"You don't say?" the Chief huffed out as he met the Elites blow. Chief tensed and then pushed, giving himself some space. He then swung with his rifle, the butte hitting the Elites head with a snap.

The Elite fell limp and slowly disintegrated.

"At least now we know what we're up against," Cortana said helpfully.

The Chief continued forwards after letting his shields recharge. He headed towards the bright light from before, since that was the only thing that had remained constant through the realm-swap.

Ten paces.

Twenty paces.

forty paces.

At around the forty-fifth step, the enemy finally showed up in force. They arrived slowly, each one arriving from a different direction. There were eight in all, all Elites in red armour, their ranks ranging from minors to a general. None of them bore a weapon, which the Chief considered to be a plus.

The closest Elite minor dived first.

A quick burst from the Chief's AR was enough to turn it to crumbling dirt, but the other Elites used the brief moment of distraction to charge simultaneously.

A ranger swung its fist, and the Chief dodge under it and retaliated with a punch of his own. Another Elite swung, and this one connected with the Chief's shoulder.

The Chief spun around and fired his AR point-blanc, cutting down two Elites in quick succession. He used the gap to dive forwards and put some room between him and the horde.

It didn't work.

The Elite general grabbed the Chief as he rolled and tossed him to the side. It stalked towards him with resounding steps, punching downwards onto the floored Spartan.

The impact drained the Chief's shields partially. He tried to retaliate against his alien assailant by striking out with his rifle, but the Elite just grabbed it and tossed it aside, sending flying off into the dunes.

The Chief grimaced and spun, using his legs to knock the General down. Once it fell, the Chief used its tactic against it and punched downwards, crushing its face with his fist.

The remaining creatures charged.

The Chief picked out the ranger first, sidestepping a clumsy blow from a minor and grabbing the ranger's head. He pulled, popping it straight off in a spray of ash.

And officer-class Elite tried to jump on the Chief, but super-soldier swung the ash-Elite he had just killed into it.

It did nothing but make the officer stumble back, but it allowed for the Chief to grab his magnum. He snapped off a shot, ending the Elites life in a spray of ash.

The Chief didn't let up. He spun around, fast as a bolt of lightning, and snapped off two more shots. Two more Elites melted to dirt.

The Chief looked around for any more enemy contacts, not trusting his motion sensor to do the job properly.

"We going after the rifle?" Cortana inquired.

"No," the Chief said. "It'll take too much time."

He set off, running towards the light with his magnum clutched in both hands, pointed downwards. His feet pounded along the desert ground, each step sending up plumes of white sand

until he was no longer there.

Suddenly, he was back on metal ground, although this metal was lighter in colouration and featured yellow hazard lines. The ceiling was a few meters above him, and wall were some ways away.

He was in a tunnel.

_No, waitâ€| not a tunnel, _Chief realized, _Cairo station._

He continued moving. He was, indeed, in a replica of the MAC station above Cairo, the very station he had defended in the opening moments of the attack on Earth.

Words were scrawled on the walls, but the Chief found he could not understand the writing. Some of it looked to be inked in blood.

He turned a corner. He was heading in the general direction of the light source, but without visual confirmation of the object he had no idea where he was or how close he was. It was entirely possible he was going the wrong way.

He considered the idea that it may be a ploy of his enemy, trying to box him in like he was now.

He turned another corner.

And another.

And another.

He looked around. He was not sure where he was in relation to his target, but he knew he was currently in one of the oxygen-gardens of the stations. That much was evident from the trees.

He went through one of the open doors. Just beyond was one of the many floor-to-ceiling windows that showed the exterior of the station: the blackness of space.

He took a moment to stare.

The outer hull was smooth, with rotating parts simulating gravity everywhere. Perhaps more disturbing where the massive, waving tentacles that were wrapped around sections of the station, their fiery skin unquenched by the vacuum of space.

They reminded the Chief of his last encounter with the Gravemind. It was not a pleasant thought.

The tentacles seemed to be clear of the MAC. It was just as large as the Chief remembered it to be, towering high above the rest of the station, reaching out into the black infinity.

And at its tip— a bright light, clearly artificial when set against the plethora of stars in the black.

The Chief took a step back. He drew back his fist, and punched the glass.

It didn't even crack.

He punched again, and again. On the third brutal strike, a crack appeared, almost hairline. He punched again and again, until the crack grew slightly wider.

Then he put his magnum against the now noticeable gap, and fired twice.

The sound of sudden decompression was almost deafening, even with the helmets automatic muting procedure. If the Cortana hadn't activated the Chief's magnetic soles, He would have been sucked out into space.

Nonetheless, she had. The Chief wasted no time, and began to walk

forwards onto the skin of Cairo station.

He knew he could not run, for risk of getting loose, but he moved with sure and steady steps.

LITTLE MAN. WHY DO YOU TRY SO HARD?

The voice was enough to make the ground beneath the Spartan's feet shift. It reminded the Chief ominously of the Gravemind.

YOU WILL NOT SUCCEED HERE.

The Chief continued forwards.

YOU WILL DIE TO ME.

The Chief stopped and looked towards the light. "Who are you?"

I AM THE DEMON ZHE'XEZ, GUARDIAN OF THE VOID, AND THIS IS MY REALM.

"Will you surrender yourself?" the Chief inquired.

HUMAN, YOU WILL DIE LIKE ONE THOUSAND OF YOUR ANCESTORS BEFORE YOU.

The Chief pondered that for a moment. "Then our talk here is done," he concluded, and continued onwards.

The demon started laughing a great, rumbling noise that sounded like an avalanche.

"Only a thousand?" Cortana question. "We killed more at the first Halo."

The Chief did not respond. He only walked.

And then, suddenly, he found himself face to face with another Spartan. The man wore a blue mark IV variety, his golden visor glinting in the light of the stars.

"Fred?" the Chief's voice was almost a whisper.

The other Spartan stood there, panting. The Chief took a step forwards.

The Spartan's fist sprung out, catching the Chief in the chest. The force of the blow instantly detonated his shield and dislodged his left foot from the station, making him flail about for a moment until he could put it down again.

'Fred' swung again, and the Chief stepped back to avoid the blow. It swung again, and the Chief repeated the action.

"Interesting," Cortana said as the Chief dodged an uppercut, "the demon seems to be able to read you memories."

"Cortana," Chief warned as he dodged yet another strike.

"I wonder if it believes that â€" "

"Cortana," the Chief said firmly, "not helping."

"Oh. Right. Sorry." She stopped talking.

The Chief narrowly avoided another fist by turning to the left. And, perhaps by fluke, turning left allowed him to see, out of the corner of his eye, another fist flying towards him.

The Chief dodged that one, too, and then dodged the left hook that came right after it.

He stepped back, facing both Spartans. He gave the newcomer a once over.

Mark IV EVA plate, all in a military white. It was slightly less-armoured than the Chief's suit, but that was understandable considering who was in the suit.

"Kelly," the Chief greeted, and found himself to be sincere.

Kelly ran at the Chief, almost blindingly fast.

The Chief sidestepped and rolled, avoiding Fred's perfectly executed roundhouse kick.

"**NOW DO YOU SEE?**"

The demon's voice made the Chief skin crawl. Fred punched the Chief, and the Chief used his forearm to deflect the blow. He could hear the servo-motors in his armour strain as he did so.

He did not retaliate, though.

Kelly began to circle around Fred and the Chief, waiting for the perfect moment to pounce.

"**THIS IS MY REALM. I MAKE ANYTHING I WANT HAPPEN.**"

Fred kicked upwards with his knee, forcing the Chief to move back. Kelly jumped then, slamming against the Chief with her shoulder and knocking him around. The force was enough to dent his chest armour.

"**I CAN GIVE THIS TO YOU, TOO, SO LONG AS YOU SUMBIT," **the voice told him.

The Chief shook Kelly off and spun low, trying to knock Fred off his feet.

Fred merely jumped and flipped backwards, separating himself from the Chief.

"**DON'T YOU WISH FOR YOUR FRIENDS AGAIN? YOUR TEAM?" **The demon was practically taunting him now.

"This isn't my team," the Chief told the creature, wherever it was. He braced himself against the ground.

"Two on one?" Cortana challenged. "Hardly fair."

The Chief jumped at Fred.

"For them," Cortana finished.

Fred tried to reach up and use Spartan-117's momentum against him, but the Chief had already anticipated that. He grabbed Fred's outstretched arm and used it to bring himself down fast and hard. The result was Fred being launched up into space like a sack of foodstuff.

The Chief did not bother to keep him up there for long. He slammed Fred back down with enough force to dent the surface of Cairo Station.

Still, Fred did not stop moving, reaching, clawing for his former leader.

The Chief drew his magnum and ended the struggling with a single shot, muted though it was by space.

"On your six," Cortana told Chief.

He spun around, firing three rounds as he did so. Kelly was fast enough to immediately switch directions, but two shots still hit her, puncturing her thigh armour.

The Chief started to move, trying to strafe Kelly as she ran.

Kelly switched directions once again, running back towards the Chief.

Chief ran towards her, his fist outstretched.

She leapt up suddenly, raising her foot.

The Chief side-stepped the dive-kick and shot her once in the side of the head.

"That was fun," Cortana said.

The Chief stood calmly, reloading his magnum. He watched the empty magazine drift off into space.

He suddenly resumed walking to his target. "Those were not my Spartans," he told the creature that ruled this realm.

The other being gave another of its rumbling laughs, again shaking the floor. This time, however, the shaking did not subside, but rather increased in intensity.

"Chief!" Cortana called out suddenly.

The Chief looked around. The massive tentacles that had been in the background were now tightening on the station, cracking the entire structure in two. Massive fractures stretched out, some racing towards the MAC.

The Chief began running, all pretenses of staying firmly lodged to the hull gone in his mind. He ran as fast as he could to outrace the

deteriorating station.

Suddenly, the ground beneath his feet started to rise. The front half of the hull had snapped clean off, and it was taking the Chief with it into the blackness of space.

The Chief did the only thing he could do. He jumped, stretching his arms out towards the tower.

And then he was falling. It was a short fall, but only the sort of fall that was possible in a gravity-controlled environment.

The Chief propped himself on his elbows. The floor beneath his was this time made of light metal, with a glowing blue groove cut into it.

He looked up, and beheld a Halo.

Well, not a full scale one. Rather, it was a blue holographic projection of one, orbiting a control panel.

He looked around. He was on a bridge, connected to the control panel. The room he was in was a large spherical room.

"The Halo control room," Cortana informed him entirely unnecessarily.

He looked back to the control panel, where a tall figure was now standing.

He moved towards it.

"**Now do you see?" **the figure asked him.

The Chief snapped his magnum up, having recognized the voice of the demon.

"See what?" he asked it, stopping several paces away.

The demon looked back over its shoulder. "**You would not hurt your friend, would you?"**

And, suddenly, the demon looked like an Elite. Not just any Elite; the Arbiter himself. Archaic armour was strapped to its body, the silver plates gleaming to an unreal sheen. Its limbs were far thicker than the Chief remembered, and its eyes glowed an unhealthy purple.

"You are not my friend," the Chief said, and fired.

The Arbiter-demon smiled, the hole the magnum had created in its skull already healing over.

The Chief was actually surprised.

It took a step towards the Spartan. "**This realm is my resting place," **the creature told him. "**I could not be banished by mortals, and so I was locked away. But I gathered my strength, and no longer shall this happen. I shall break free, and recover what was stolen, and â€" " **

"Stolen?" Cortana inquired. "What was stolen?"

The Arbiter-demon genuinely looked perplexed. The Chief assumed it was because it had never been interrupted before. **"My quintessence of damageâ€| surely you know of this?"**

It got no answer.

"It does not matter. I am already so close to breaking free, and that is one step closer to retrieving it."

It waved its hand, and a dozen holographic displays sprung into existence.

The Chief peered into one, and regretted it instantly.

"You see," the demon said delightedly. **"Everything you know will end. You cannot fight me in the other realm, for my numbers are too numerous. You cannot fight me here, for everything you know is mine to command."**

It showed the pavilion. There were guards, and Irelia, and blue team. They were fighting, but only like a fisherman fights a tsunami. The enemy â€" the fire â€" was brushing past them, knocking them down as if they were no more than insects. For every one they cut down, another ten sprung into existence from the portal.

"Despair," the arbiter told him.

The Chief could see everything in detail. Yasuo's windshield was pierced through by large tentacles that hoisted him into the air. Riven was being swallowed up by a horde of fiery snakes. Irelia was on the ground, trying to defend against the enemy with a single floating sword. Tryndamere was standing on willpower alone, his body covered in a dozen mounds. Katarina was totally out of commission, unconscious on the floor. Graves and Thresh were back-to-back; the only thing seemingly left standing. That did not seem like it would last long.

"Would it not be so much easier to submit? Then I could guarantee your friends' safety."

The Chief did not answer for a long, hard moment.

He responded, after much thought, with another bullet to the forehead.

The demon sighed. **"So be it."**

It moved fast, fast enough to slam the Chief to the far side of the bridge.

The Chief stood up shakily, raising his magnum.

He was suddenly kicked in the stomach, and was knocked down again, this time much closer to the edge. His chest was stepped on, and he could feel the metal plates crack under the stress.

"I am so very sorry," The demon informed him as it raised him up.

***"Your mind has been interesting. I crafted all this from your thoughts. Your mind is the basis for this current realm."**

It seemed to ponder this for a second. ***"In fact, I like it so much, I think I shall keep it like this."**

It smiled.

***"Have fun giving your mind to me."**

It tossed him over the edge.

* * *

><p>It was like floating in liquid darkness.<p>

The Chief came to, unsure of how much time had passed. He was only aware of floating in darkness.

He looked around, trying to pierce the black. He found himself unable to.

"Chief?"

He looked up, finally, and saw a single speck of light. It was vaguely familiar to him, but he could not remember why.

He tried to move his arm, but found that his armour would not respond. That was odd, as he was sure it was not in lockdown.

It must have finally given out.

"Chief?"

The Chief listened to the voice.

It was also vaguely familiar. Who was it?

"Chief?"

It came to him. "Cortana."

"Oh, good, you're awake," Cortana said. "We need to hurry up and get back up â€" "

"What happened?" the Chief was thoroughly confused.

"You don'tâ€™? You were tossed off the edge, Chief. We broke through a bunch of ice-looking sheets and came to a stop here."

"Oh," he responded. "I can't seem to move."

"That'sâ€™ not good," Cortana told him. "There isn't any way to get power here."

Chief grunted.

"What do we do?" Cortana asked him, and he found that oddly amusing. Generally, that question came from him.

"I don't know," he responded with honesty.

"There must be something." Cortana sounded insistent.

"I don't know how to fight a demon in a realm where it controls everything," the Chief informed his AI. "I wasn't trained for that."

"You were trained for adaptability, though."

"Not for anything like this," the Chief said irritably.

It took him a while to figure out that it wasn't that Cortana who had spoken.

The Chief turned his head, and beheld the newcomer. "Sargent Major?"

The man smiled, his teeth a perfect set of white in his dark face.

"Johnson," the Chief said. "Are you one of that things' illusions?"

"Why, Chief," Johnson pretended to be hurt. "You wound me."

The Chief just looked at him.

"Of course not. This is your mind, after all."

"What does that mean? I am in a demon's home-"

"Are we really going to take an inhuman bastard at its word?" Johnson smiled again. "It told you it was based off your mind, did it not?"

"It was lifting things from my thoughts â€" " the Chief tried to tell him.

"No," Johnson said. "It re-crafted this world from your entire mind. It must have done so before, every other time some happy-go-lucky hero passed by."

The Chief didn't say anything.

"Which means it can be beaten easily," Johnson concluded. He reached into his pocket and grabbed a sweet-Williams cigar, which he promptly lighted.

"How do you know this?" the Chief asked.

"I don't. You do." Johnson took a puff from his cigar. "I said this was your mind, right? I'm just a memory. Or something." He shrugged. "Everything I just told you is something you figured out, probably subconsciously."

"It said it was trapped here. And if it takes minds like it does, then whoever trapped it won despite being in a realm crafted from his own mind."

"That doesn't help much," Chief informed him.

"Of course it does," Cortana said confidently. "We just have to â€"

"Out-think it," the Chief finished.

Johnson nodded sagely.

"Oh, how I love the subconscious," Cortana said aloud.

The Chief shook his head. "This is all too bizarre."

"Alright, man," Johnson said. "Get thinking."

There was flash of light, and Johnson smiled. "See," he said to no one in particular, "I know what the Spartan's like."

* * *

><p>The demon stood at the control panel, this time in the form of the Master Chief. It was staring idly into the holographic displays, seemingly content with itself.<p>

It was, needless to say, incredibly surprised when a fist smashed into its face.

It reeled backwards, and turned to face its assailant â€" the Master Chief.

"**You areâ€| back. That is unexpected.**"

"Of course." The Chief raised his magnum. He was no longer wearing the scrap metal he had come into that place with. His armour was fresh, an unblemished suit of Mjolnir mark VI. On his hand he had a magnum, and on his back was an assault rifle.

"**Why do you insist on fighting?" **The demon almost sounded alert, as if it was caught in the headlights of an automobile. **"You cannot fight against me. I am everything you are not.**"

It took a step back. **"Why do you think, since the very beginning, you have been attacked? Because your foe is incredibly clever, and laid in wait until the perfect moment?" **It shook its head. **"If you were how you used to be, it would never have happened. You see, you allowed it to occurâ€| every attack, every time you motion sensor 'failed'. You are weary, tired, too much to continue.**"

It raised its arms.

"**Allow me to fulfill that role, fill those shoes. I can let you rest, and be a better you.**"

There was another long, tense pause.

"There can only be one demon," Cortana answered for the Chief.

The Chief fired his magnum, all three shots splintering armour.

The false Chief swung out, and the real Chief deflected the blow with

his forearm. He rotated smoothly right afterwards, sending the other Chief tumbling forwards.

The demon recovered quickly, dashing back to its target and unleashing a flurry of punches.

The Chief intercepted every one. He even got a few of his own in, tearing out chunks of false armour each time.

The demon thing moved back and roared, trying to shift forms again.

The Spartan did not give it the chance. He grabbed onto it, holding it still and pressing the muzzle of his pistol against its neck.

He fired four times in quick succession.

Perhaps the demon was able to quickly regenerate from a single wound, but four in the same spot ruined any chances of a quick fix.

The demon was still able to fight, though. It reached out; trying to grab a hold of the Spartan, but the Chief slapped aside its arms once more and moved in close, smashing his fist into its midsection.

It cried out and stumbled back, but the Chief did not let up. He pulled it forwards, and ripped out his knife from his shoulder-sheath in one smooth motion. Less than a second later, it was buried in the demon's skull.

The creature began to slowly melt to ash. The room began to shake.

"We should run," Cortana suggested.

The Chief started running.

* * *

><p>Kolminye was amazed when the horde of fire stopped.<p>

It had been an incredibly hard-fought battle. By the time she had reached the spot with Karma and Syndra, the others had been almost entirely overrun. The only thing that had saved them was Thresh's spectral walls, summoned around blue team and Irelia.

They had all fought to free themselves, but it appeared to be hopeless. That was, until, they all vanished. All that was left of the enemy arm was the dust blowing into the wind.

"That was intense," Graves said with the kind of air only an outlaw could give.

"Shutâ€| upâ€|" Katarina huffed.

"Why are there always so few souls?" Thresh inquired aloud. No one deemed it fit to answer him.

The portal in between the pillars flashed violently, and a figure stepped through. Not even a moment later it collapsed, leaving an empty doorway.

"Chief." Kolminye was surprised. The Chief was standing before them, looking fresher than the day he had arrived in the reflection chamber.

She reflected he was probably fresher than he had been in a long while.

"Go figures," Riven said with a sigh. "He dives into the void and returns with an awesome new suit of armour."

"Yes," Kolminye said slowly, "It does appear that way, doesn't it?" She really needed to stop underestimating him.

Karma stepped forwards. "Thank you for the service you have given this city," she told him.

He only nodded, focusing instead on his team. "Is anyone hurt?"

"Just totally bruised all over," Yasuo whined. "Y'know, the usual."

"We're alive and kicking," Riven told him, which earned her a laugh from Tryndamere.

"Spartan, beforeâ€¦ this," Karma waved her hand, "it was decided that our army would stay here. However, in light of recent events and our clear inability to fight it-"

Irelia's shoulders slumped a fraction.

"-I am sure we can now give you the army you requested."

"Good," the Chief said, bending down to try and treat some of Riven's more intense wounds, "We'll need it."

Kolminye blinked. "And why would that be?"

"I remembered some things." The Chief looked up, meeting Kolminye's inquiring gaze with his own, although his visor blocked his eyes. "Or rather, Cortana has."

Kolminye's eyes widened in understanding.

"We've compiled the data," Chief said.

"Somewhat hastily, I might add," Cortana cut in.

"And we've identified a clear pattern, as well as possible locations for the enemies' stronghold."

Kolminye took a step forwards. It seemed as if the entire pavilion was hanging off the Chief's every word.

"We're going to Piltover," the Master Chief concluded.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

"Well, shit."

"I know."

"What are we going to do?"

"I don't know."

"We're so screwed."

"I know."

"Ugh, you gotta think of something."

"I'm trying," the sheriff snapped. "Now stop talking."

"Sorry." The enforcer shrank back.

"I should have seen this sooner. And they were so close, too!"

"I don't think anyone saw this coming. I mean, seriously, an army under Zaun? Really?"

"Vi, Quiet. Really."

"Sorry, cupcake."

Caitlyn sighed and rubbed her temples. "Well then," she said, shouldering her rifle, "let's just hope we can stall the forces of Zaun for long enough."

"Until?" Vi actually, genuinely, looked confused.

"Until the Master Chief gets here, of course," Caitlyn told her, entirely serious.

"You think he knows?"

Caitlyn shot her a look.

"Right. 'course he knows."

44. Chapter 44

Chapter 44: From the Cradle...

Invasion of Piltover, day 5

Another gangster ran up to the railing above, setting his plasma repeater down on the iron bar in order to maintain some sort of accuracy while firing. He never had a chance; a piece of rubble was thrown at him at fatal velocity, causing him to fall off the other side of the gantry.

VI, the enforcer of Piltover, turned around, searching for a new target. It wasn't very hard to find them, seeing as how gangsters were crawling all over the place.

She was currently in the industrial district, nearer to the shores of the city. Five days ago, the mechanical army had sailed across the bay that separated Piltover and Zaun and had begun a large-scale invasion. Piltover may have been able to hold out for more than a couple of days, but the local gangsters decided to rise up against the defenders of the city. They were all armed with plasma weaponry, much like the weapons the police force had found a few months prior.

Clearly, they were part of the conspiracy.

Not that it mattered. VI's job was simple: hold the industrial zone until other squads could arrive. This area was next in line to fall from the mech advance, not even half a dozen blocks away from the invasion forces' beachhead.

And the industrial zone was, in turn, only a couple of blocks away from the new site of the UNSC _Forward unto Dawn. _Caitlyn, the Sheriff and now leader of the Piltover defense forces, assumed that was their main target, and so was acting accordingly. Numbers, though, was the main problem, and they did not have enough patrolmen to guard all vital points of the city. Rotations were the most important piece of their defense.

A gangster ran straight up to VI, tailcoat splayed out behind him, plasma spraying out wildly as he fired from the hip.

VI stood still, allowing all the poorly-aimed bullets to miss her. Once the gangster was close enough, she punched him lethally in the face.

The man fell, dead, but VI was already pivoting, another ruffian behind her trying to draw a bead. A swift punch was enough to see him on the ground.

VI gazed around quickly, looking for the thickest fighting. Spotting the fight she wanted to get into, she drew her right fist back and began to overcharge the boosters in her gauntlet. After several seconds she unleashed the built-up power, launching her forwards across the space.

She landed in the midst of the enemy with a crash, and immediately began to lay waste with her fists. The first man fell with his face crushed, and the second was sent to the ground with a bone-shattering kick.

VI spun around and punched with both of her fists, sending out a wave of powerful force that knocked down the rest of the gangsters.

The arcane crystals set into her gauntlets began to soak up the excess energy, converting it into an energy field that surrounded her.

The field blocked plasma rounds from one surviving enemy, but he too was dead a moment later.

Vi reached down and grabbed one of the plasma repeaters. She examined it carefully. Finding the trigger guard to be much too small to fit her gauntleted finger into, she ripped it off. Once satisfied, she aimed it with one hand at a pair of enemies on the gantry above.

She fired, but nothing happened. She snarled and looked at the weapon again, this time taking notice of the red gauges on the side. She flicked some buttons, to no effect.

The two gangsters noticed VI, and brought their weapons to bear on her.

Vi flicked a button, and two flaps on the side of the weapon opened up, venting heat.

The bullets began to impact against her shields, draining them frighteningly rapidly.

The flaps on the weapon closed, and Vi once again took aim and pressed the trigger. A flurry of shots hissed out, melting part of the railing and the chest of the first gangster.

The second one looked to his fallen friend and began to run, but a volley from Vi took him down as well.

"Sir! Vi, sir!" The enforcer's radio crackled to life.

VI ran to the side and took cover behind a pair of packing crates. She snatched up her radio and pressed the button on the side. "What's up?"

"We've got a problem," the man on the other end said. "Mechs are pouring in, reinforcing the bastards."

"Damn," VI swore. "Keep 'em pinned, officer. I'll get there."

"Understood," the man said. Shots could be heard over the radio before it shut off.

VI rose up out of the cover and used her rifle to put down one enemy that had strayed too close.

"Yo, Marcus!" VI's shout attracted the attention of other gangsters. VI noted with some worry that there were more in the warehouse than before. "I'm headin' out. You're in charge!"

"Seriously!" Marcus shouted back, sounding almost like an eager puppy.

"Don't screw up!" she called out, charging up her gauntlet once more.

She dashed towards the approaching gangsters, slamming into the first one and knocking him to the ground. She aimed her rifle downwards and fired, melting a hole through the guy's chest.

She turned her attention to the rest of them, and raised her rifle.

She pressed the trigger, but only one bolt of plasma exited the barrel before the entire thing began to steam, red lights flashing.

"Shit," VI swore and tossed the weapon aside, reverting back to an old fashion smashing.

A gangster tried to hit her with an electric maul, but VI stopped the blow with the back of her gauntlet.

Another enemy tried to strike with the butt of his rifle, but VI caught the weapon in her other hand and crushed it into scrap.

A third enemy lined up her weapon with VI's head.

Vi dropped down as the plasma raced out towards her, dragging down the enemy with the maul.

As she reached the ground she smashed her fist into the guy's face, killing him instantly. She grabbed his body and tossed him into the rifle-armed gangster, dropping her to the ground.

VI turned her attentions back to the criminal she had ripped the weapon from. He paled, and perhaps thinking he could outrun the enforcer, he tried to move past her.

VI stuck her leg out and tripped him, before delivering a fatal blow to the head.

She moved back to the female gangster, who was still trying to get back up.

VI grabbed her by the collar.

The woman hissed at her, and VI snapped her neck.

"Only one woman allowed in here, bud," VI told the corpse.

Vi stooped down and grabbed the woman's plasma repeater, and then started running towards the exit.

Few enemies tried to stop her progress, and that was fine by VI. She maneuvered through the maze of crates, before exiting through the main door.

None of the guards she had posted at the door were still there. _Most had probably run off to join the fight_, she mused.

She moved quickly, running to the shipping area. That was the only area that the enemy could attack in force, since the rest of the warehouse was much too small to allow anything other than humans in.

She turned the corner, and had to swing back immediately to avoid a volley of heated plasma.

Frowning, she lowered the goggles on her head over her eyes, tinting her vision with blue. She turned the corner again, sprinting past the wildly firing plasma weapons.

She dashed into cover as soon as she found it. She lay against it for a moment, before peeking around the side of the stone block.

Her police force was hiding behind pieces of rubble and fallen

masonry, firing basic revolver pistols. Some were wounded, but all were fit to fight. Not that it mattered, since VI would make them fight regardless.

Another flurry of shots smashed into VI's cover, sending splinters back into her.

She brushed them off, and took a good look at the enemy forces.

She couldn't see all of them, since the cover they were in was far superior to hers. However, she could see almost a dozen criminals, all dressed in identical black coats. Behind them were a couple of squads of advancing ranger-pattern mechs, with more mech probably behind cover.

The focal point for VI, though, was the incredibly large human in the center of the horde. It â€" VI could not be sure of gender at all, if it even had one â€" wore some form of heavy armour and chassis. It held a crude-looking axe in its left hand, and was pointing with the other towards the building.

VI tucked back into cover. She checked her gauntlets each one by one, before adjusting her goggles. "Okay," she said to herself, "show time."

She rose up from cover, and stared directly at the large, augmented leader. She pointed her right gauntlet at it, allowing the sophisticated acquisition system inside to get a lock on him.

The being noticed, and at some unheard command, the mech forces switched their fire away from the strained police force.

"Part one, done," Vi whispered as the fire stitched towards her.

Her gauntlet lit up, the system understanding her target. The vents and pipes along the side began to hiss with steam and power.

The bullets raced towards her, but VI took matters into her own hands and raced towards the bullets, her gauntlet-jet propelling her towards her target.

The energy projectiles merely bounced off her form, the energies bleeding from her acceleration deflecting all the rounds.

The enemy commander had only enough time to jerk his head back before VI was upon it.

She slammed into him at full force, delivering a viscous uppercut at the same moment. The enemy commander was thrown upwards from the strength of that hit, making it rise several meters.

VI did not let up for a beat. She grabbed the commander by the leg and slammed down, smashing him against the ground with such force that the concrete cracked for meters around.

She quickly followed up with dual punches, focusing the excess power forwards to increase the force of the hit.

Bullets began to rain upon VI as the mechs realized the threat she posed to their commander.

VI protected herself by having her gauntlet crystals absorb the extra energy to form a shifting shield around her.

The being beneath the enforcer twitched, his hand reaching out to grip an axe that was no longer intact.

VI grimaced in annoyance and delivered another set of punches to her target. Around her the sound of gunshots intensified, although the sounds were more of a booming noise than the whine of plasma. Evidently, her police forces had gotten the idea and started firing back.

The commander, against all reason, twitched again.

VI punched him again, as her shields flashed from the plasma fire.

She hit him again, and again, and on the third strike she shattered through his armour and pulped the flesh inside.

She rose up to her full height and stood there, shaking loose her stiff limbs. Around her the fighting was ongoing; although it was clear the police now had a clear advantage. VI could see out of the corners of her eyes that the enemy was falling back.

She lifted up her blue-tinted goggles, squinting a bit as dust stung her eyes. The air was hot and dry, a trait VI had learned to associate with any area that featured high plasma expenditure.

The enforcer clapped her hands together, and turned around. She was happy, since they had managed to drive the enemy back for a short while. It would take some time before the enemy could reform and push through this area, and every moment they were waiting the closer the relief army could reach the city.

VI only hoped there was an actual relief army coming. The enemy was somehow blocking all communications in and out of Piltover, and that was posing a real problem. Heimerdinger was working around the clock to fix that issue. And then there was also the matter of the Triad blockade that stopped anyone from getting in and out. The original plan had been to get the civilians out fast, but since that was no longer possible they had been moved to fortified fallout bunkers.

It was only a matter of time before civilian casualties began, though, and there were certainly some souls still stuck inside the buildings.

"Hey, Chief?"

VI looked up.

"I think we have a prblem," the officer said, pointing.

VI followed his finger, and beheld the mech army.

"Wellâ€¦ damn."

* * *

><p>Caitlyn ducked back into cover as a fresh volley of shots hammered into the stonework, chipping away at the already ruined stone. She counted herself lucky that her assailants were not equipped with plasma weaponry; her cover would not have lasted if they did.<p>

The sheriff ejected the current magazine from her long rifle, allowing it to fall to the ground with a clatter. She reached for another clip, slamming it home in one swift motion and racking the slide.

She immediately popped back out of cover, fast as a viper, and let off two near-simultaneous shots. She ducked back into cover again, not bothering to see if her shots had hit.

The cries of pain she heard clearly indicated that they had, however.

As Caitlyn prepared to launch herself back out into the open, her radio crackled to life.

"Yo, Cait?" VI's voice was unmistakable.

Caitlyn reached out for her radio, which was on the ground some paces away. She remembered dropping it there in haste, back when the shooting had started in the area.

"Vi?" the sheriff asked, holding down the activation rune, "report."

"So terse," VI said with a sigh. "Where's the lov-"

"Report," Caitlyn repeated firmly as another round of bullets passed overhead.

"Fine, fineâ€| you know the distri-area-thing I was supposed to be holding?"

"Yes." Caitlyn fired off another shot from her rifle, dropping down a triad member who had been lugging around some sort of heavy weapon.

"Well, it seems the enemy's main force is marching on it. Dunno if I can hold it."

The sheriff swore, an incredibly uncharacteristic action of her. "VI? Fall back. No point in risking anything."

"Ehâ€| are you â€" "

"I am sure," the sheriff reaffirmed.

"M'kay," VI said casually. "Over and out, then."

The radio fell silent.

"That woman is going to drive me crazy," Caitlyn told herself. Unfortunately, VI was the source of her stress like usual. Rather, it was the massive enemy army that was the cause.

The plan she had come up with had been so brilliant: small, static teams with emplaced weapons defending key locations, and fast-moving offensive teams to flank the enemy when they hit those defended spots. Unfortunately, such a plan only worked when the enemy had a limited amount of troops to bring to bear, and they actually cared about conquering what they were invading.

So far, the enemy army seemed far too numerous to handle with the limited police forces the sheriff had at her disposal. Worse still, the triad and automatons alike seemed perfectly content with destroying every part of the city they came into contact with.

Except for the _Dawn, _of course. The few enemy squads had managed to pierce the cordon around space vessel treated it with the utmost care, much unlike the rest of the city. It was clear that was their main target, and yet Caitlyn was sure they wouldn't be able to hold it if push came to shove.

Caitlyn's radio crackled to life once more, but this time the deep baritone voice of a venerable officer came out. "Chief, we've got emplaced weapon teams up on scarlet bridge."

"What weapons?" Caitlyn asked smoothly. It suited her, and everyone else, best when she showed as little of her inner turmoil as possible.

"Well, they areâ€¦ kindaâ€¦ blueâ€¦ ish?" The man sounded unsure. "Honestly, I have no idea what they do. All I can figure out is that they shoot hot bullets."

"That's fine, corporal," she said calmly. "I'll be there as soon as I can."

"Be careful," the corporal warned, "the buggers are everywhere."

The radio clicked silent once more.

Caitlyn breathed out heavily through her nose, and rubbed her eyes with her left hand. Almost immediately after she returned her grip to her rifle, clasping it firmly as she rose out of cover to watch the proceedings below.

The few remaining Triad gangsters were taking cover behind what used to be merchant stalls, and were blind-firing in the vain hope of hitting something. The two police officers Cait had placed were doing an effective job of keeping those criminals pinned down and unable to advance.

Both of said officers were positioned in the arched doorway of the city treasury, a moderately sized building of yellow stone. One was operating a scaled-up version of Heimerdinger's HG-series turrets, and the other was wielding a bolt rifle. The two patrolmen, while being the only in defense of the building, were putting the heavy weapons to good use and driving the enemy back.

But Caitlyn had no plan of letting them finish up on their own. From her own high vantage point in an apartment complex, she was able to easily see over the cover of the enemy. She took careful aim, lining up her shot far faster than the average marksman.

She fired, and the head of one criminal exploded.

"Boom," Caitlyn said to herself as she lined up another target in her sights, "headshot."

She fired again, felling another triad member.

The enemy, perhaps realizing once more there was a sniper in the area, tried to make for more effective cover.

Each one was shredded down the moment they ran by the heavy turret that had been so effectively placed.

The sheriff watched for several more moments through the scope of her long rifle before she stood up. She reloaded again, slung the weapon over one shoulder, and quickly made her way out of the apartment.

She had to descend several floors before she could exit the building, dodging pieces of rubble and wood that had gathered the staircase.

Once out in the open, though, it was an easy matter to make her way to the scarlet bridge. While the enemy, specifically the triad in this portion of the city, were present in force, it was easy for the sheriff to make her way unnoticed. She knew the city like the back of her hand.

Nonetheless, she was still sure to use care while moving through the rubble-strewn streets. If what VI had said was true, and the mechs had finally emerged in force, then the streets would be far more dangerous than before.

There was a sound to the sheriff's right. She unslung her rifle and started walking slowly and silently.

The sound repeated, coming from an alley way to her left. Caitlyn pressed herself against the wall and shuffled slowly, her rifle pointed slightly downwards.

She reached the corner, and peered around the bend.

Two triad members, dressed in long brown cloaks, were trying to shift some sort of crate. It was marked with fragile symbols, so Caitlyn thought it was safe to assume that it was some sort of jewelry.

It didn't matter. Both had set their weapons down as they moved the heavy object, and so Caitlyn used the opportunity to line up her shot.

Neither of the enemies noticed her, up until the first round left the barrel of her rifle.

The first criminal dropped down, dead. The second spun around quickly, shouting, his hand reaching out for the weapon that was no longer at his hip.

Caitlyn fired again, hitting the man full in the chest. The force of the impact knocked the man back, and he landed on the crate that they

had been so vainly trying to move.

Caitlyn stepped forwards quickly, moving to the two criminals. She quickly checked to see if they were dead, but it proved unnecessary. There was no way they could survive the hits.

"What the fuck?"

Caitlyn spun around, seeing a triad member emerge from an alleyway door. He held a small jewelry box overflowing with pearls, and an auto-pistol in the other.

Caitlyn raised her rifle immediately, but the space in the alley made it slow.

The man raised his pistol, firing before he had even lined it up.

Several rounds grazed Cait, tearing bloody lines in her uniform. That still was not enough to stop her from lining up her rifle, and firing.

At such close range, the effect was devastating. It ripped through the man, shredding his cloak and sending him backwards.

Caitlyn took a moment to breath. She slung the rifle over her shoulder again, and quickly appraised her wounds. She had taken no direct hits, but the amount of grazes could impede her progress.

She ripped a piece of cloth from the most intact triad cloak, and wrapped up her arm that had taken the most hits. Her body would be too hard to tie up, so she left it for later, when she could find some adhesive cloth or health potions.

She resumed moving, taking more care now that she had been hurt. Even so, she made good time and reached her intended location.

The sound of battle could be heard from a block away, such was its intensity. Caitlyn moved faster, trying to find a good position to snipe from.

She spotted a watchtower, a metal structure made of hoops and struts and pipes. Figuring it would provide a clear view of the battlefield, she started climbing up the ladder that led to the top.

Only once did she slip, but otherwise reached the top without incident. She started setting up at once, placing her rifle on one of the metal bars facing her target location. She crouched down, one leg far forwards, and pressed her cheek to the cold wooden stock.

The area that she had been called to, the scarlet bridge, was a bit of a misnomer. The area was a sort of ravine, cut into the city by artificial means. Huge pipelines stretched the length of the depression, each one lined with sapphire crystals. Magical energy was pumped through them to other areas of the city, and that gave them their red appearance.

The issue was, if this area was to fall the enemy would have another supply line that would be much more difficult to cut off. And it seemed that the enemy was close to capturing it.

Police forces and city militia were crouched behind pipelines and massive valves, firing pot-shots with their pistols and rifles. Triad members were set up on higher ground, and most were clustered around emplaced heavy plasma weaponry.

Caitlyn hesitated. The use of plasma weaponry here was disturbing to her. The risk of destroying the pipeline was disturbing.

She crushed those hesitations, and got ready to fire. She did not have time for doubts.

Her first shot punched through a heavy gunner, knocking him off the high pipeline he had set up on.

The triad members reacted fast, looking around with panicked glances. One tried to operate the heavy plasma weapon, and Caitlyn was forced to put him down too.

Some criminals began to zero in on her position, drawing ever closer with their questing eyes.

Caitlyn fired thrice, putting down two enemies in quick succession.

The last bullet missed, and the final triad member fell backwards and started frantically crawling away.

The sheriff swore and fired, killing the crawling man.

She swiftly reloaded. As she racked the slide back again, she looked down for a quick ammo count. She had only four magazines left, and that was not nearly enough to prosecute a guerrilla war. She would need to return to a supply base soon.

Suddenly, plasma rounds began to hiss through the air around her, some getting dangerously close to her.

She swept her eyes around, looking for the source, and found it. Another enemy gunner position seemed to have spotted her and was firing at her. Clearly, her shots had attracted the attentions of more enemies.

Caitlyn tried to reach the ladder, thinking that perhaps she could climb back down it and find a better position, but the structure began to list.

Looking over the side, Caitlyn could see gaps in the metal struts holding the structure up. Plasma rounds that were missing the sheriff were hitting the metal of the structure and melting it.

Caitlyn frantically gripped her rifle with one hand and wrapped her arm around another strut, using the strap on her weapon to secure herself.

The tower began to lean dangerously to the side, and Caitlyn gripped all the harder. More plasma rounds hissed through the structure beside her, making her flinch back.

There was a massive cracking noise as stress finally won out and the

struts of the metal watchtower snapped. The entire structure fell, smashing into the side of the ravine before sliding down, pieces of metal and wood flying off with every meter it slid.

Caitlyn found herself hard-pressed to stay inside the structure. Small pieces of wood and metal were hitting her, but did little damage.

Another snap, and this time Caitlyn found herself sliding forwards. Her gun's strap had snapped from the stress placed upon it, and Caitlyn was flung out of the falling structure.

She hit the angled ground with a thud, and then began to roll downhill. Thinking quickly, she tried to use her rifle to slow her descent.

It worked just enough. She tumbled to the flat ground with much less force than the structure, which smashed with a massive boom and shattered into a thousand pieces.

The sheriff stumbled to her feet, feeling the myriad of bruises that had just made themselves home on her skin. There was a sharp pain in her left leg, too. She grabbed her rifle, which she noticed with distaste now had a dozen more scratches and fissures.

Much as she might want to rest and recover, she knew she could not stay out in the open. She moved swift steps, only slightly limping. The pain was minor, and for that Caitlyn was thankful.

Another burst of fire assailed the sheriff's eyes, but she noted that the bullets were not directed towards her. They were being fired from above her position, shooting somewhere to her left.

The sheriff backtracked, trying to find something that she could use to climb the house-sized pipeline. She found it after a few careful minutes: a small step-ladder set into the side. She moved up it silently, her rifle raised with deadly intent.

At the top was another of the weapon emplacements. One triad member was operating the weapon, while two of his allies were standing behind him with weapons raised. They were clearly unafraid of any sort of retaliation, and so did not take cover.

That made Caitlyn angry. She stood stock still, and fired right into the gun operator's skull.

The two triad members turned as the operator slumped forwards. Caitlyn tuned with precision, and shot the other man in the face.

The third one jumped forwards, believing that he could overpower the sheriff in close combat.

Caitlyn swung her rifle around, ignoring the burning pain in her right arm. The man's head snapped back and he fell to the ground, curling.

Caitlyn aimed her rifle downwards, and fired into his chest to end his struggles.

Worried of a repeat of what had just happened, Caitlyn quickly looked around, searching. She saw on more gun emplacement nearby, and raised her rifle.

Another through struck her in that moment, and so she did not fire. She instead moved to the emplaced heavy weapon, setting her long rifle on the ground and gripping the curving, foreign weapon.

She swung it towards the last emplacement, and opened fire.

The weapon kicked slightly, but it did not take much to keep it in target. A flurry of plasma rounds sliced towards the target.

The enemy swung towards her even as deadly bullets rained upon them. Their gunner opened fire, and the rounds impacted not even a meter from where Caitlyn was crouched.

She maintained firing, her finger keeping the trigger firmly pressed. After a few minutes, the last bullets died off, and no signs of life were evident from the other emplacement.

Caitlyn sighed, and rubbed her right arm. After a few minutes of resting, she scooped up her rifle and slid down the pipeline. She moved towards the police forces, making sure to move in a way that would not cause them to shoot on sight.

"CHIEF? THIS IS WONDERFUL."

One of the officers rose out of his make-shift cover and ran forwards. Well, not an officer per say. Rather, it was Blitzcrank, the great steam golem. Caitlyn had almost forgotten about him, since she had just assigned him to do whatever he wanted, really. She had no jurisdiction over him, since he was a champion.

"Hey, Blitz," she greeted.

"YOU ARE WOUNDED. IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ASSISTANCE REQUIRED," Blitzcrank said in his booming voice.

"After, Blitz," Caitlyn said warily. "Is everyone else alright?"

"YES," Blitzcrank stated, "EVERYONE IS OPERATIONAL."

"Great," the sheriff said. "We need to get them up on those emplacements, and guard this area a bit better."

"UNDERSTOO-" Suddenly, a warning sound began to emanate from the golem.

"What's that?" Caitlyn inquired, stepping back warily. Several other officers who had just gotten out of cover looked around in alarm.

"WARNING. ENEMY FORCES INBOUND."

"You can tell all that?" Caitlyn murmured under her breath. Maybe she should have made better use of the machine. "Can you tell where they are coming from?"

Blitzcrank raise his arm, and pointed to the edge of the ravine. Caitlyn looked there, and saw a mech force lined up against the edge.

"Ohâ€¦ hell," Caitlyn said with a sigh.

"RUNNING WOULD BE ADVISABLE," Blitzcrank stated.

"Yeah, sounds good," the sheriff said.

Everyone began to run.

Plasma rounds began to rain down from above, cutting down officers as out in the open. There was practically no cover to hide in, and so patrolmen were killed left and right.

"We need a way to top them!" Caitlyn shouted to Blitz.

"WE NEED A WAY TO STOP THEM," Blitzcrank clarified.

"That's what I just said!"

"YES." Several rounds hit blitz, but were deflected by his static shielding.

"Hey! Do you think you can use that static is strong enough to overload something?"

"DEPENDS ON THE THING," Blitzcrank said. The bullets hitting the golem intensified, but were having no effect.

"Follow me, then!" Caitlyn changed directions abruptly, turning back, running hard. Blitz followed easily, unwittingly protecting the sheriff from plasma fire.

They turned several corners of the pipelines, as Caitlyn tried to find on of the massive valves that lined the place.

She saw one ahead, and stopped once she reached it.

"Okay," Caitlyn said. "Detonate this."

"YES." Blitzcrank said, standing still.

"â€¦now, please," Caitlyn clarified.

"OKAY." Blitz raised his fist, and punched the valve, sending a thick plume of smoke hissing out. He moved closer, and the static field detonated.

A wave of electrical energy passed through the sheriff, making her skin tingle, but otherwise causing no effect.

"Soâ€¦"

"WE HAVE FIVE MINUTES."

"Oh." Caitlyn looked around to find some quick exit.

Blitz suddenly grabbed the sheriff in one huge hand, cradling her as

one would a baby. "WE GO."

Caitlyn was given no time to protest before the golem started running, and running fast. He moved faster than before, practically zooming through the maze of pipes.

Some bullets began to hit the steam golem, some even managing to punch through his skin, but did not slow him.

Finally, blessedly, they escaped the maze. They continued running, though, and did not stop.

So when the pipes finally exploded, and the mech army on the edges of the ravine was annihilated, they did not even get to see it.

They did feel the heat, and the plumes of smoke and static. However, that did not matter to the sheriff of Piltover. She knew that event like this hurt the defenders more than the attackers, and they had plenty more automatons to throw into the battle.

She could only hope the Master Chief arrived in time.

45. Chapter 45

Chapter 45: ...To the Grave

Liberation of Piltover p.1

The consequences of the exploding pipeline were far worse than the sheriff of Piltover had anticipated. While she and the great steam golem had succeeded in annihilating a decent portion of the automaton advance force, the ensuing magical blast had unforeseen consequences. The compressed magical energy that had run through the pipes had caused a field of static, neutral magic to radiate outwards, causing a dead zone of magical objects in the surrounding quadrants.

For the police force, that posed a massive problem, as much of Piltover was run on hextech systems. The automatons did not seem to care, as they seemed to have been upgraded to be proof against the static wave.

So, as it was, the police force under the command of Caitlyn found themselves nearly cut-off and unable to use any of the key systems of Piltover in their defense. The force commanded by VI was in a somewhat better spot, but Caitlyn had been unable to make contact with them for a while. The hextech transceivers had been burnt out, too.

And so Caitlyn found herself in an incredibly unsure situation, fighting around the Piltover clock tower. Everything made it evident that they would be unable to hold the building, but there were very few places to retreat to.

Caitlyn grimaced as she considered her options. Retreat would certainly lead to a great loss in lives, but so would staying and fighting. Perhaps enough would survive if they retreated that they could still act as an effective fighting force, and perhaps link up with the remaining forces under the command of the Piltover enforcer.

There was a loud bellow, and the horde of automatons parted for a moment to reveal one of the augmented commanders. It was gesturing wildly, pointing out areas it wanted to attack.

Caitlyn smiled grimly. She aimed at the commander's head, but noticed that she was too far away to make an accurate shot.

But she wasn't about to let it get away. She pressed a button near the butte of her rifle, toggling on one of the many features.

Her rifle extended with a sharp click, the barrel and scope nearly doubling in length. A red magitargeter activated, the beam dead-on with the commander's head.

The augmented human noticed it, and tried to get it's automatons to intercept the impending shot.

It did not work. The bullet flew out with incredible velocity, puncturing it's helmet and pulping it's head flat.

It dropped noiselessly, for the din of battle was far too loud. Unfortunately for the sheriff, the multitude of rangers that the augmented man had summoned noticed her and began to fire precise volleys at her location.

Caitlyn pressed the button again, allowing her sniper rifle to return to its original state. Without hesitation she began to snap off shots, not really aiming but with the amount of enemies it was difficult to miss.

And so it went on. Every shot saw another enemy fall. Her police forces were firing in admirably disciplined burst, cutting more of the enemies as they ran.

Unfortunately, it did not seem to make much of a difference. Despite the police force being in a highly entrenched position with numerous kill-zones and high vantage points, the enemy was far too resilient and numerous to stop them entirely. While the defenders could reduce their number greatly, they could not prevail.

And so Caitlyn, being thoroughly convinced of her impending defeat, was caught completely off-guard when the enemy began to reform. Half of their ranks turned right around, facing back the way they came, while the rest just dropped and began to lay down a hail of fire, intended to keep the heads of the police force down rather than inflict any casualties.

A great, booming horn sounded, echoing off the spires of Piltover. It was accompanied by the sound of heavy drums, and a fanfare of glorious trumpets.

Caitlyn's finger twitched against the trigger, but she held her fire. Something was coming, as was indicated by the swirling shadows through the plasma steam.

She just couldn't decide whether to save her ammo for the new threat, or the mechs.

Suddenly, spectacularly, and somewhat frighteningly, a great mountain

of a man emerged from the smoke like a hellish beast, roaring in defiance and pain. The automatons immediately fired upon it, plasma rounds sinking into the thing's grey flesh.

They didn't work. The being " and Caitlyn had a lurking suspicion that she knew what it was - continued to charge forwards, smashing into the first few ranks of the automatons. As soon as it got far enough it slammed its fist down, sending out a shockwave that knocked down the few automatons still unlucky enough to be in range.

Almost immediately it began to lay in with its axe, arcing the weapon in brutal swings and ruthless down strokes.

The front line of rangers began to turn around to face the new threat, and Caitlyn sprung on the opportunity. She had her forces resume their fire, but she no longer had them save their heavier munitions.

Ranger carapaces cracked as bullets thundered into them, their focus completely on the giant and his newly-arrived allies.

Each one marched in perfect ranks, their bronze armour flashing and green robes flapping. Their shields were held in front of them in perfect lock, showing extreme martial discipline.

By their sides marched archers in blue and silver, their attire glowing with an almost near-perfect sheen.

The rangers and jackal-pattern switched fire from the undead warlords to the approaching troops. Combined, they had enough plasma fire to turn aside the allied advance, or even weaken it to the point where the battle could go either way.

But they were machines, and could not comprehend what lay in store for them.

Scion raised his axe high, and all the jackals turned in unison to fire their potent beams into his dead flesh. The dead man grimaced, but held his cool as his axe reached its terminal point before thundering down. A large chunk of the jackals were thrown skywards, killing them instantly.

While distracted, the Demacian archers swiftly made a line behind the ranks of Noxian spearmen, notching arrows and letting loose.

While the arrows had a negligible effect on the metal automatons, it served to soften them up and provide some screening against the ranger's fire. Many Noxians fell upon the way, but each gap in the line was quickly filled in.

Despite the losses, the allies reached their intended targets. Their charge smashed against the clumped automatons, penetrating into their formation with shocking ease. And then the battle descended into chaos, as spearman slashed at metal and rangers cut down Noxians. The Demacian soldiery had swapped their bows out in favour of paired daggers, and were adding their own contributions to the melee.

Caitlyn continued firing, and every time her finger pressed down on the trigger another mechanical monstrosity fell.

But the automatons were not about to allow themselves to be drawn into a pitched battle they could not win. They began to reform, drawing back in good order as their more isolated squads threw down covering fire.

Allied troops caught in the crossfire were cut down, and their ranks struggled to bring their shields to bear against the new sources of ranged fire.

The enemy clustered and fell back, trying to surround the largest of their number.

Caitlyn noted with some distaste that she had not noticed said giant mechs beforehand. She highly doubted they had been hiding, but they seemed to have just appeared.

The large mechs unfolded themselves, their massive shield-arms swinging into a guard position as their arm mounted canons lit up.

There was another loud noise, this time a shriek of straining metal and the whine of powerful machinery.

Like a descending angel, a pelican drop ship emerged from the smoke high above the battlefield. Bullets chased it from the smoke-filled sky, but none touched the zooming vehicle.

It flew dangerously low over the battlefield, strafing the ground-based automatons with its nose-mounted machine guns.

It tore through the center of the formation, the heavy rounds even managing to rip through one of the large mechs.

As quickly as the pelican arrived it left, zooming through the spires until it was out of sight.

A few seconds later another pair of drop ships passed over the battlefield, but these ones payed no attention to the battle below, instead content to chase their prey through Piltover.

Caitlyn could only stare at the retreating ships. Once they passed from view, she looked back to the battlefield below. It was a smoking ruin, the entire center having being blown apart. The allied army was running up that gap, separating the automaton forces even further/

Caitlyn looked back to the sky and removed her hat. She tilted it in salute, although she knew no one would be able to see her.

"Godspeed, Master Chief," she shouted, her words audible over the sound of firing plasma, booming guns, magical blasts and clashing swords.

* * *

><p>The pelican drop ship swung to the side, narrowly dodging a salvo of racing bullets. The shots impacted against the side of a building, ripping through layers of wood and steel.<p>

Inside, the passengers were less than pleased with the ensuing dog fight. They had been harassed upon reaching the perimeter of the city, and as of yet had been unable to shake off their pursuers.

There were ten people in total strapped into the back compartment of the Pelican. The leader of the operation and his usual team were there, as well as Tryndamere, Katarina and Lux. The Ionians had graciously allowed their own two Champions, Irelia and Ahri, to accompany the growing command squad.

For some reason, everyone decided that the troop compartment was cramped, despite being made to hold two full squads.

"We have more incoming fire!" Viktor's metallic, accented voice grated over the cabin speaker.

"We didn't shake 'em yet?" Graves asked, his voice unsteady. The outlaw of Piltover was pale, evidence to his unease with flight. He was clearly determined, though. As he had previously stated, he was not about to allow those 'damned mechs' to take his city.

A sentiment everyone agreed with.

"Chief? Got any ideas?" Riven asked from the back of the compartment. Even she sounded unsure.

The Master Chief turned his head slightly. "Viktor, turn the ship around."

"I am not sure if you are aware," Viktor said with a sort false patience, "but we are under fire from two enemy aircraft behind us."

"Turn us around," the Chief said again calmly. "And prep the main canon."

"This is utter foolishness," Viktor stated but did as he was bid.

The aircraft whined as it spun around suddenly, the boosters on the side allowing for a near-sudden change in direction. The pelican's underslung weapon flashed, a beam of ruby-red light snapping through the air towards the enemy aircraft.

The two enemy craft swung clear of the beam, taking them out of the path of Viktor's vehicle. Using the opening presented, the pelican shot forwards.

There was calm for a few moments, before the sound of racing bullets commenced again.

"That did not work," Viktor called out. "As I saidâ€¦" he muttered after, but the speaker picked up the words regardless.

"It worked," Chief said. "The spires are now in front of us."

"Only open air behind us," Yasuo finished with a nod.

The Chief nodded also. "Open the rear hatch."

"Do I need to mention that one well-placed shot will blow us all sky-high?" Viktor sounded genuinely perplexed.

The Chief didn't respond, and the hatch lowered with a whine of hydraulics and the hiss of magical energy.

The light of day poured into the compartment, along with gun smoke and the near-deafening sound of discharging heavy munitions. Tryndamere whooped, clearly exited by the high-speed chase they were currently engaged in. Graves, on the other hand, turned away from the open sky and said, "no please."

The Chief examined the two other pelicans with a trained eye. "Ahri," the Chief commanded, glancing back. "Can you charm the one on the left?"

Ahri blinked and her ears twitched. "Charm the machine? Sure, I can try."

The Chief nodded as another fusillade of shots rang out. Each one missed the open compartment, but made it dangerously close.

As Ahri moved up behind the Chief, the Spartan gestured to Lux. The Demacian nodded, understanding what the Chief intended without any words.

More shots rang out, and this time a few managed to find their way inside the troop bay. Each round impacted against the Chief's shields, causing them to flash brightly.

Ahri's palm lit up with pinkish energy. She held it high, aiming carefully at the leftmost gunship. After a minute she thrust that hand forwards, the pink energy blasting forth in a cloud of magic. It soared forth and impacted against the cockpit of the enemy flier.

The leftmost pelican began to sway, drifting into the path of its partner. The second airship had to turn away before pulling back completely just to avoid being crushed by the charmed one.

"Lux," the Chief called out.

Lux switched places with Ahri. She braced her feet and held out her baton as static energy began to play across her armour. The tip of her weapon opened up, revealing more of the generator-haft. A blue light shone out of the end, lining up perfectly with the enemy gunship.

The generator on her baton glowed with incredible brightness as it reached full power. With a cry of 'Demacia!' Lux fired, a pinpoint beam of energy impacting against the pelican.

If the air vehicle had still been under its own power, it would have been able to avoid the beam. As it was now, it allowed the energy to hit it directly. Despite its reinforced framework, the potent beam ripped across the upper half of the gunship, tearing massive holes in the reinforced plating.

Even before the beam had died off a series of secondary explosions started as the energy overloaded critical systems. The pelican, now awash with flames, tilted upwards slightly before falling away back to earth.

"Good job," the Chief said as a final explosion marked the death of the once-dangerous air vehicle.

"Yes, Yes, grand," Viktor said over the speaker. "The second pelican is coming around for another attack, and we are reaching the designated location soon. If you wish to get off, now is the time to do so."

"Get off?" Graves asked, still looking firmly at the bulkhead.

"Okay," the Chief started. "Ahri, Tryndamere, this is your stop. Remember: you are to liberate â€" "

"The armoury, yeah," Tryndamere finished. "I know, we've been over the briefing seven times."

"The fact that you can count impresses me," Katarina mumbled from the back of the vehicle.

Tryndamere grinned widely. "Alight, let's go!" he shouted as he jumped out of the open hatch. Ahri shook her head and followed him, but used her magic to float her way down.

"â€|that wasn't in the briefing," Graves said, glancing over at the Chief.

The Chief looked over open ramp, assessing the situation on the ground. "Katarina, Irelia," he called out, "You're up next. Secure the secondary power plants, and the munitions depots if possible."

Katarina did not respond, instead simply sashaying over to the open ramp and disappearing into thin air.

Chief looked to Irelia.

"Don't worry," the Ionian captain of the guard told him, "I'll keep an eye on her." With that she jumped onto her interlocking blades and zoomed out.

The Pelican began a wide turn, tilting the cabin bay slightly. All the other occupants had to steady themselves, but the Chief remained steady and standing. "Yasuo, use your wind powers to make sure Riven and Graves reach the bottom safely."

"Whaaaaa?" Graves sputtered out. "Nah, that 'aint happening."

"Lux, float down. Threshâ€|" the Chief hesitated. "Do what you always do?"

The specter nodded.

Satisfied that everyone was ready, the Chief went over his personal armoury one final time. His primary armament was his BR55 battle

rifle, and his secondary was his M6H magnum. He also had his MA5D and his Spartan Laser on his shoulders, adding greatly to his bulk but entirely necessary for this battle.

This battle would be the end game, or as close to the endgame as they had gotten so far. If they couldn't pull off a victory in Piltover, then it was unlikely that they could finish off the automaton forces anywhere else. A win here was vital.

"Enemy flier coming in for another attack," the cabin speaker announced.

The Chief nodded, half to himself and half for the benefit of the team. He walked to the edge of the ramp, and stepped off.

He fell through the air at a blistering pace, his armour dragging him back down to the ground. He glanced back, briefly, just to see his companions exiting the Pelican. He could also see the enemy Pelican, sweeping around with its weapons blazing.

Viktor managed to jinx past all the incoming shots, and returned fire.

The Chief didn't see if Viktor hit anything, as the ground was just below him. He could trust Viktor to win the skies.

He hit the ground with a roll, coming up on one knee with his BR55 raised

The triad members around him merely stared, stunned at the sudden appearance of the green-armoured giant.

The Chief's first burst hit an officer directly in the head, dropping him like a puppet with its thread cut. His second burst of fire hit a triad member in their center mass, creating a fist-sized hole through him.

By that point, the triad was beginning to react to the enemy in their midst, but even as they did so the rest of blue team touchdown.

One gangster found himself without a head as Thresh's scythe lashed out. The specter had landed in the thickest knot of enemies, and had to throw his lantern down to shield himself from their return fire.

Yasuo came down next, crashing down with a pressure wave. Several enemies were knocked off their feet, allowing for Riven to get close with her sword.

"Yasuo," Chief called out. Yasuo turned to him, and the Chief gestured with two fingers at a nearby building.

Yasuo stared for a moment before understanding. He drew out his own battle rifle and began to fire off shots.

Chief fired another burst as he turned to Graves. "I need you to—" he trailed off as he saw Graves on his knees, a queasy look on his face.

Shaking his head, the Chief returned his attention to the triad. They

were beginning to focus their fire, and their troops were shaking off their confusion and were forming up.

A burst of blue energy signaled Lux's arrival onto the field of battle. Almost immediately the Chief signaled to her and had her project a shield around the squad.

As soon as the shield shimmered into existence, the Chief stood up and began a systematic elimination of enemy troops. Every burst secured another kill, and every kill thinned the enemy ranks significantly.

One of the triad members moved to pick up some sort of heavy weapon, possibly a man-portable rocket-launcher.

"Lux," the Chief called out, indicating the heavy weapon.

Lux tossed out a magical sliver of blue light, and everything caught in its path found itself suddenly unable to move. The light mage followed up with a ball of blue-white light, sending it deep into their formation before detonating it.

The explosion of magic destroyed half of the enemy formation, leaving the rest as easy pickings for the rest of blue team. All in all, it took the Champions one-minute and thirty-two seconds from touchdown until they cleared the area of all enemies. _The numbers are decent for a non-Spartan squad, _the Chief mused.

"Okayâ€|Okayâ€| I think I'm good," Graves managed to say.

"Finally," Yasuo said, reloading his rifle clumsily.

"Lux, I want you on that roof," the Chief gestured to one of the larger buildings in the area, "Provide support for other squads and help Viktor maintain air superiority."

"Understood, Chief," Lux said brightly as she skipped off.

"â€|too perky, that one," Thresh noted.

"Ready up," Chief told his team. "We need to break their rearguard and linkup with Prince Jarvan's forces in the eastern quadrant. Only then can we-"

"Consolidate our forces, yes," Cortana finished. "We know, you've said it seven times already."

"Whoa," Yasuo blinked. "DÃ©jÃ vu right there."

The Chief glanced around. There were a little over a dozen bodies lying around, each one near some crate. The Chief realized that the area must have been a small supply outpost, but a poorly-equipped one. Or perhaps it was not poorly-equipped, but properly equipped. The enemy probably did not expect any significant attacks by the Piltover defense forces, and so left the area lightly guarded.

That made for a somewhat depressing thought.

"Now we go," said the Chief, and he began to march.

His teammates followed him, spreading out swiftly. They had been dropped off some ways away from Jarvan, who would be pushing down the city even as the Chief pushed up.

That had been the plan that they had all come up with on the journey to the city. After much deliberation, it had been decided that the best attack would occur on two main fronts: one in the north-east, and one in the north-west. Each would consist of elements from all the major-city states, all assigned under a single battle-leader. They would break through the enemy cordon and push towards the city center, establishing supply lines and outposts as they did so.

But the Chief knew that would not be enough. The enemy would be able to hold them off for long enough to accomplish their goals if the allies simply tried to push up, and so a secondary plan had been made. The single Pelican in their possession would be used to fly through the city and drop off small teams to gain control of useful areas.

The Pelican would remain to achieve air-superiority and proved support for ground units, while the largest squad "led by the Master Chief" would advance upwards and meet up with the army led by Jarvan. While that meant that the eastern attack force would face the hardest fighting, it would also collapse the enemies' western flank and loosen their control on the center.

At least, that was the plan. Its execution relied on blue team actually managing to pierce the enemy rearguard, and that would not be easy.

"Whoa," Graves said as two beams stabbed out of a nearby building, "we got contact."

The Chief aimed his rifle, sighting it on the two jackals on a nearby balcony. His first burst shattered the machine, but the second burst went wild. The surviving jackal ducked behind the doorway, out of sight.

But he was not about to let it live. He aimed his BR55 just beside the doorway, right at the fancy wooden paneling. He fired, the bullets ripping through the wood and puncturing the metal body behind it.

"Contacts down," the Chief told his squad.

"Yeah, we can see that," Yasuo said sarcastically, earning him a cuff from Thresh.

"I'm sure I didn't deserve that," Yasuo campaigned. Thresh merely shrugged.

They continued walking. The street was deserted, and pieces of rubble were scattered across the place.

"Wasn't their rearguard supposed to be around here?" Riven inquired, one hand covering her eyes as she looked around.

"Yes," the Chief answered. It was true; they were supposed to have landed fairly close to the enemies' back lines.

Chief tried communicating with Viktor. He opened a comm channel, and was rewarded with the sound of static.

"â€|Viktor?" the Chief couldn't tell if there was anyone on the other end of the link. "Viktor, do you read?"

Static.

The Chief turned back to his squad. "Alright, we're â€" "

"What? Viktor's mechanical voice sounded annoyed. "What do you want?"

"Are you okay up there?" Chief asked, genuinely concerned.

"I am alive. I assume you did not call for pleasantries."

"Can you see their rearguard?"

"One second."

There was silence for a full minute.

"Found it," Viktor announced. "It is exactly two block away from your position, due east. I see several squads, maybe heavy armour."

"Thanks," the Chief said at the same moment Cortana said, "thank you."

Cortana finished the conversation. "We'll be in touch. Good luck!"

"I don't need luck," Viktor scoffed as the channel went dead.

"Great," Cortana said aloud. "That away, team!"

No one moved.

'Kinda forgot no one else can see the objective markers," Cortana said sheepishly.

The Chief shook his head and set off in the proper direction, and everyone followed. He made sure to have everyone spread out, in order to increase their combat efficiency.

They passed through another desolate street. They could all hear the sounds of distant combat, but it was impossible to tell which side was winning from the sounds alone.

Once they reached the three-way intersection at the end of the street, Chief took cover, and signed for his squad to do the same.

He peered around the corner. The street was different from the others, featuring a muddier road more wooden structures. Presumably, this area was older than the areas he had already been through.

More importantly, there were enemies at the end of the street. Not

very many, only a handful of triad members sitting around some crates, but nonetheless it was an indication of their rearguard.

"It's a good thing they have human fighters in the back," Cortana observed, and the Chief agreed. With triad soldiers in the back, that meant that the automatons would be their vanguard fighters. It would be much easier for blue team to penetrate a rearguard of humans rather than mechs.

"Six triad, one heavy weapon," the Chief reported back to his squad. Each had been outfitted with small hextech transferal systems, and the Chief's helmet had been upgraded to better integrate with those systems.

The word 'upgrade' made the Spartan a bit uncomfortable. He was not entirely sure of what had happened in Ionia, or why he had a brand-new suit of armour, but he wasn't the one complaining. While it was against everything ONI had dictated to him, it was welcome regardless.

"Want me to take them out?" Yasuo asked, unsheathing his energized katana.

The Chief shifted away from the glowing orange edge of the sword. "No. Graves, I want you to smoke them."

Graves puffed out a thick ring of black smoke. "M'kay," he mumbled, grabbing a special cartridge out of his belt and loading it into his shotgun. He walked out of cover, aiming high and letting loose.

The canister flew through the air in an arc, black smoke trailing from it. When it finally landed in the midst of the enemy it detonated, creating an inky cloud around them.

Chief could hear coughing and hacking from the around the corner, and used that as his queue to order his team forwards. Naturally, he was the ahead of the rest of the group. Riven was the closest to him, her training allowing her to run with incredible focus.

The Spartan tore through the cloud of smoke, his first blow caving in a skull. Cortana brought up the heat-visor, rendering the black smoke cloud ineffective for him.

He targeted a highlighted enemy and fired two burst, the first rocking him back and the second knocking him flat.

And then the rest of his team arrived, slashing and hacking. Only Graves did not participate in the slaughter, content as he was to leave the killing to everyone else.

As the smoke cloud dissipated, the Chief looked around to take in his surroundings. Aside from the fallen triad, there were crates of energy cells and spare mech parts. The only thing that he did not see was rations, so he could only assume that Stanwick did not deem food as necessary for his conquest.

"There aren't very many of them, are there?" Yasuo said, mostly to himself.

"We have not even met significant resistance yet," Riven told him, wiping her blade clean of red liquid.

"That's â€" " Yasuo's words were quickly cut off by the sound of multiple plasma repeaters.

A flurry of shots ripped into the open space where the team was. Many bullets hit Yasuo, but his passive wind shielding managed to block most of the shots before vaporizing.

Graves, who was closest to Yasuo, was not so lucky. He took a volley into his unarmoured side, causing him to grimace in pain and fall to the ground. The ronin quickly manipulated the winds into a wall that deflected the rest of the bullets.

"Thresh!" the Chief calmly, pointing to the fallen Graves. He then moved forwards, stepping right up to the wind wall and aiming with his weapon.

He saw a group of triad, five in all, running down the adjoining street with their weapons blazing.

They'd finally made contact with the rear guard.

The Chief fired, his first burst dropping the lead man. His second and third bursts killed the closest, dropping him like a stone. His fourth burst took down the triad woman carrying a heavy weapon.

There was no fifth burst as his rifle ran out of ammo. He quickly swapped magazines, racking the bolt to get rounds into the chamber.

The triad was close now, so the Chief opted for close-quarter combat rather than waste more ammunition. He ran forwards and swung down, but the triad grunt dodged. Chief lashed out with his fist and threw the man back several meters, the grunt only halting when he hit a pile of bricks.

The second guy tried to fire at close range, so the Spartan grabbed his weapon and forced it upwards, discharging its plasma rounds into the sky.

A quick punch ended the man's life.

"I'm fine, I'm fine," Graves said through gritted teeth. The Chief looked over to him and assessed his bio-readings, and was satisfied to see that everything was in operational ranges.

Thresh stood up and held up an empty flask. "We have two more healing potions," he told the Spartan.

"We conserve the rest," the Chief told him. "Are you fit to fight?" he asked Graves.

"Y-yeah," Graves responded. He rose up, grabbed his shotgun and cigar, and puffed out a couple of more smoke-rings.

"Then let's move."

They passed through the next street, putting down the minor resistance they encountered along the way. There seemed to be only minor squads on patrol. The sounds of fighting did, however, intensify. It was clear that something was going on nearby.

They turned another corner, and finally encountered the rear guard.

The area was uplifted, sort of like a landing platform would be in UNSC space. There were clusters of men, each standing around heavy weapon ammo crates. They were ferrying ammo to the advanced lines, before returning for more. On the center of the platform was a massive stalker tank, its legs braced and its carapace open.

Just as the rest of blue team reached cover, the stalker tank fired, its potent energy projectile raced off to some unseen target. The recoil from the weapon made the tank rock back slightly, but its braced legs absorbed much of the shock. The nearby triad suffered more, clearly shaken by the shockwave.

The Chief observed this all carefully. Charging right in would be reckless, and result in casualties that could be otherwise avoided.

"There are a lot of them," Riven whispered to him. She, too, was focused intently on the enemy formation.

"What would you do?" he asked her. Cortana was scanning a map for him right now, and overlaying it with previous records of the Piltover street plans.

"Disorient them somehow, charge in with our shields up," Riven said thoughtfully. "Someone stays back and provides cover-fire."

The plans lit up on the Chief's visor, showing the current layout of the area. The incline that they appeared to be on was a recent creation, a result of something collapsing. The road below was just rubble now, and that was where the main battle was taking place. Cortana had also highlighted locations nearby that were similar to this one, and could potentially be other artillery-nests.

"Alright," Chief told his squad over the comm, "once the gun fires again, we're going in. That should confuse them long enough for us to get to grips with them. Thresh, drop your lantern here and hook yourself into the thickest fighting. Summon your spectral walls.

Riven, once that happens, grab the lantern and dive in. Take no risks, but eliminate the enemy quickly. Yasuo and I will charge up the center, since we can take the most punishment.

Graves, you stay behind us and advance slowly. Make sure you have an explosive charge ready; when I tell you to shoot, I want you to fire it at the walker. Everybody understand?"

"Man, I love suicidal charges," Yasuo said with mock enthusiasm, earning him another cuff from Thresh.

"Get ready," Chief whispered as he tensed his body.

The stalker-tank fired again, the resulting shockwave signaling the charge of blue team. The Chief saw Thresh's hook lash out and grab an enemy, but did not see the follow-up action. He was focused on the enemy dead ahead, and he knew he could trust his team to do what they needed to do.

He raised his battle rifle, waiting for his reticule to shine red before firing. The three rounds hit a grunt up his side, spinning him around into one of his comrades. He fired another two bursts in quick succession, killing another two grunts.

Yasuo's rifle barked into life, matching the Chief's burst-for-burst, resulting in another half dozen slain triad members.

And then they were in then they were in the thick of it. The Chief dodged a poorly aimed blow for his head, shooting his assailant at point-blank range. Another triad trooper ran at the Spartan with a curved sword, forcing him to roll back and make some room.

Yasuo swept in, dashing through the sword-wielder and cutting him clean through. The wanderer proceeded to dash through another two grunts, cutting them down swiftly.

The Chief looked to the left. He could see Thresh's spectral box through the smoky air, and he could see green flashes of light reminiscent of Riven's rune blade. He briefly considered turning on his heat-visor, but decided against it. With the amount of plasma expenditure, it would probably get all fuzzy.

He looked to the right. The stalker-tank was beginning to turn around, finally having noticed the battle raging around it.

The Chief forced himself to ignore it, and focused on thinning out the enemy. He could see Yasuo just ahead, unleashing a powerful tornado to sweep away a half-squad of enemy troops. However, the action left him open from left, where another squad was readying themselves to unleash their weapons.

Chief took aim at one of the munitions crates, the smallest one he could find that was nearest to the firing line. A quick calculation from his AI informed him that three bursts would be necessary to start a chain reaction in the crate.

And that was what he did. He placed three bursts in exactly the same spot, aiming for maximum penetration.

The crate began to hiss white smoke. One of the firing line soldiers briefly glanced over, and then looked away, and so was unable to stop the lethal explosion that occurred a few seconds later.

The explosion ripped apart the squad, and provided Yasuo ample opportunity to switch his focus.

The Chief then turned back to the tank. It had finally turned around, and it was once again readying itself to fire; this time at Yasuo and Chief himself.

"Graves," Chief said over the team channel, "I need an explosive shot."

"Lighting the bastard up now," Graves informed him.

The explosive shot made a sound akin to a gauss round as it ripped through the air. It hit the stalker in its side armour, right where it was beginning to open up. It detonated with incredible potency, rocking the stalker back and threatening to tip it over. Half of its shell was covered in blazing hot flames, coming from the impact location.

The stalker-tank's left set of legs buckled, sending the vehicle crashing to one side. The fire continued to rage, but it failed to find purchase on the metal exterior.

The Chief turned away, content in the elimination of that threat.

And then Graves said, "well, shitâ€¦"

Chief turned around to see the stalker-tank rising back up. Its legs unfolded, bringing the tank back to its normal position. The flames that had licked across its metal skin had died down to embers, revealing its now pitted and blackened skin. It was very much operational.

"Okay, time for plan b," Chief said to himself. He blinked-clicked the comm open, and said, "Graves, I need you to move up and provide covering fire. Yasuo, keep everything else off of me."

The Chief didn't wait for a response. He gripped his battle rifle in both hands and started running towards the very much operational tank.

The stalker-tank's primary weapon began to turn, slowly spinning up as the Chief ran towards it. When it fired, it did so in a blaze of light and with a hail of bullets. The Chief, already anticipating this, dropped to the ground and started sliding. He maximized the resistance of his energy shields, allowing his armoured form to almost glide over the rocky ground.

The vehicle tried to get its target back in its sights, and so aimed lower. The bullets sipped through the ground, getting nearer to the Chief. When they finally did, they impacted against the Spartans shields in flares of light.

But his personal shielding system could not hold out for long. Less than a dozen of the large rounds hit the shield before it detonated in a burst of static, and a few more bullets managed to hit his newly-repaired armour.

As soon as his shields broke, the Chief rolled to the side and ran around the stalker. The vehicle's weapon tried to track the evasive Spartan, but could not turn fast enough to get back on target.

Once the Chief was around the stalker he jumped onto its legs, and pulled himself upwards onto the shell. Once on top, he aimed his battle rifle down into the cracks of its armour and fired.

The tank gave no sign of acknowledging the rounds piercing through its skin, but it did try to shake the Chief off its body. It rocked itself from side to side- trying to dislodge the Spartan.

Chief continued to fire, his HUD's ammo counter ticking down frighteningly quickly.

The left set of legs on the stalker suddenly gave way, whether on purpose or by chance the Chief could not tell. However, it did knock the Chief off his feet. His battle rifle flew from his grasp, and he slowly slid off the pitted shell.

He quickly thrust his hand into one of the cracks in the carapace, and held on tightly as the stalker-tank began to rise again. He used his free hand to unholster his magnum, which was still firmly mag-locked to his hip.

He lifted himself up, and placed his magnum against another of the cracks. He fired until his magnum clicked empty.

Suddenly, he could see smoke rising from the shattered shell, and bright lights glowed from within the mechanical creature.

"Yasuo!" Chief commanded. "Summon a wind wall!"

"Already did!" Yasuo shouted back. "Gotta wait one."

The Chief threw himself off the vehicle, and saw something by his feet. Quickly realizing it was a lantern, he grabbed it with his free hand.

Disorientation, nausea, and confusion.

And then he found himself many meters away, on his hands and knees, staring at the stalker-tank. Several explosions ripped across its flanks, each blast a bright, caustic green. Finally, one last explosion tore through the mechanical tank, annihilating it in a cloud of thick smoke.

"â€|Thanks," the Chief said to Thresh.

"Don't mention it," Thresh told him.

The Chief got up, and stretched his limbs which had become cramped from the flash-teleportation. His shields charged back up to full with a static whine.

He looked around. Yasuo and Graves seemed to be unharmed, and were pacing through the rubble and bodies with calm.

Riven was to his right, cleaning her cracked sword. She had a host of new cuts on her, drawing the concern of the Chief.

"Are you all right?" he asked her while reloading his magnum.

"I'm fine," Riven said with a tilt of her head. "I â€" "

"Chief," Graves said gruffly. "The fancy prince is trying to push up."

The Chief looked over to the edge, and walked towards it. He had to step over bodies and crates, making it a slow going. He went right up to the edge, and looked out onto the battlefield.

There were dozens of blue-cloaked soldiers in bloody melee with mechanical opponents, fighting intensely in the ruins of Piltover. There were red-cloaked and green-cloaked soldiers there, too, but they seemed to be focused on adjoining streets and so the Chief could not make out the full extent of the battle.

He could clearly see the command squad, the fancy-armoured warriors of the vanguard being led by Garen and Jarvan. They were cutting through the metal horde, but the ranged fire from the automatons was keeping them from breaking through completely.

"Cortana, give me waypoints on the other gun emplacements," the Chief told his AI partner.

Two waypoints popped up on his visor display. One was fairly close by, on another incline, but the other was far off. Getting there would involve fighting through the battlefield below.

Unfortunately, the smoke was too thick to make individual details out on the closer emplacement. Two blink-clicks re-activated his thermal visor, giving him a more accurate view of the target. The heat emissions of the enemy heavy weapon were making it all somewhat inaccurate, though.

"Cortana, get me a two-times magnification."

The Chief's visor pixelated for a brief second before resolving itself into a clearer view of the target area. While the heat emissions still made vague clouds in his vision, he could more clearly see the enemy emplacement. It was similar to the one he had just cleared, featuring more triad grunts and a stalker-tank that rained artillery fire down on the allies.

The Chief unlimbered his Spartan Laser, setting it down firmly on his shoulder. He got down on one knee, knowing he would need the extra stability to ensure a one-hit kill shot.

As he pressed the trigger down a red beam of light sprung out, connecting the barrel of his weapon to the targeted enemy.

At almost the same moment the enemy stalker began to charge up its weapon preparing to fire on the unsuspecting Demacians below.

The red beam of light intensified, the Chief's weapon whining with intensity as it charged up to full. A beam of super-charged energy sprung out from the tip, lashing across the open space and impacting against the barrel of the stalker's weapon.

The two energy fields connected with explosive force. The built-up energy from the stalker tank caused a lethal explosion that ripped apart the entire plateau, sending chunks of rock and flame into the metallic crowd below.

"â€|damn," Graves called out. "I really need to get myself one o' those."

The Chief put away his Spartan Laser, satisfied with the results he had achieved. He exchanged it for his assault rifle, since he had lost his battle rifle to the stalker-tank and lacked the time to go

searching for it.

"Alright," he said, "We need to get down. I'll go first, so provide cover fire. If things get too hot, Thresh, toss down a lantern."

Thresh nodded.

"If I get down safely, Riven comes down next, then Yas, then Graves. Understood?"

"Why am I last?" Graves inquired. "Not that I care or anything," he hastily added.

"Because you can provide the best covering fire," the Chief replied, already searching for a way down the ledge.

"I don't know if that's an insult for me, or not," Yasuo wondered aloud.

The Chief found himself some handhold to use, as well as a small make-shift path he could try and follow. It was rocky and unstable, and made for a difficult climb, but the Chief managed to get down despite that. The incline wasn't very high, so the climb down was not very long. Luckily, nothing had noticed the Chief's descent, and so he made it through unscathed.

He motioned for the next person to descend. He swept around the area with his assault rifle, making sure it was clear of threats. The ground was littered with tiny shards of cobble stone, and small pools of water had gathered in between shattered concrete.

It didn't take long for everyone to descend. They all stepped carefully over the rubble, alert for enemy contact. They were in a battlefield, after all.

The Chief climbed up a mound of scrap metal, possibly the remains of some automaton. The battle raged very close by, and he could easily see the enemies' back line. He judged it would be fairly easy to collapse, with some planning.

His motion sensor gave a sudden ping, a contact appearing behind him. He spun around, only to see a mechanical hand reaching for his face.

He grabbed the hand, and flipped the automaton over his shoulder. It was much heavier than he had anticipated, though, so it did not get very far.

The zealot tried to rise back up, but the Chief planted his boot firmly on its chest piece and fired down. He littered its body with a dozen rounds, ending the creature's existence.

Graves shotgun suddenly kicked into action. The Chief glanced over, only to see a small group of zealots moving towards the outlaw.

Thresh moved towards Graves, intent of imposing himself between the two parties, but was stop as another Mech suddenly rose up from behind him.

"Chief," Cortana said, "I'm getting a bunch of readings. I think these were in stand-by mode."

"Great," the Chief said. "Yasuo, Go help out Graves. Riven, you help Thresh."

"We got the front?" Cortana inquired.

"Yes," the Chief said, prepping his assault rifle. There was a group of zealots approaching from the direction of the enemy battle line, perhaps a counter-attack squad.

"It was a rhetorical question, Chief," Cortana sighed as battle was joined.

The Chief fired at the nearest enemy, using nearly a full magazine to take it down.

A zealot rushed at him, its red sword flashing, and the Chief rolled under the blow. He stayed in a crouched position, and fired the remainder of his magazine into it.

The zealot sparked and stumbled, but was still very much alive.

"Chief, 9'o clock," Cortana told him.

The Chief dodged back, avoiding the down stroke of a great sword. He rose up, and tackled the zealot.

The zealot let go of its weapon, still imbedded in the ground, and tried to get the Spartan off of it.

The Chief ducked one of its clumsy blows, and lashed out with the butt of his rifle. It cracked against the head of the enemy, but did little more than cause several sparks. The zealot slammed its fist down, and the Chief blocked with his assault rifle.

"Chief, another coming in," Cortana informed him.

Chief kicked with his armoured boot, denting the enemy's body heavily and forcing it back. He then put his assault rifle away, and turned around. He gripped the great red blade still imbedded in the ground, and pulled.

It came loose with a spray of dust. The Chief spun the sword around, not even bothering to switch stances with it. He cut a zealot into two horizontal pieces, and watched them slide apart.

The Chief brought the blade up in a guard position. The injured mech from before came at him, its own sword cutting through the air. The two weapons clashed against each other. Chief stepped back and thrust forwards, but the zealot slapped the blow aside and cut forwards with its blade.

The Chief spun to the left and cut forwards again, this time slicing through the zealot's chest, driving up all the way to its head.

The Spartan let go of the weapon, which was now firmly lodged in the

chest of the dead automaton. He turned back to the last zealot, the unarmed one.

It opened its clawed fists, and leant forwards, as if readying itself for a charge.

The Chief drew his magnum and fired four times, cracking its skull-plate open.

He holstered his magnum, and reloaded his assault rifle. Everyone else was finishing up with their own battles, and were attempting to regroup.

"Blue team," the Chief announced over the open comm channel, "time to break their ranks."

* * *

><p>The Chief walked past the hastily assembled tents, avoiding bodies on stretches and piles of medical supplies.<p>

"A lot of casualties," Cortana observed.

"As was expected," Chief answered with. Many people featured grave wounds, and none seemed to have simple cuts. Most were swathed with bandages, red seeping through.

"We probably won't have enough supplies to treat everyone," Cortana told him. "Logistically, I mean."

"They have magic," the Chief told her. He knew that a bunch of Ionian life mages, led by Soraka, had been split up among the allied force. They would be able to heal people effectively, if not quickly.

"Huh," Cortana said. "Magic. Didn't think of that."

Many people they passed by tried to reach out and touch him, calling out to him. He allowed them to do so, as Cortana said it would be good for morale.

He walked for a little ways, climbing up inclines and ramps and stairs until he arrived at the make-shift command center.

It had been set up in a broken building, and featured a fairly good view of the city. A host of people were gathered there, all talking.

They all fell silent as the Chief entered.

Jarvan smiled first. His golden armour was covered in soot, and had deep cuts and bullets holes. "Ah, here is the resident hero!"

"Don't say that too often," Cortana joked, "or it'll get to his head."

That got a laugh out of most of the assembled leaders.

"How is everything going on the left?" the Chief inquired, getting straight to business.

"Fairly well," Ashe, queen of the Freljord, replied. "Reports from messengers and communications from the High Councilor say that they've made a good advance. The enemy is still putting up a good resistance, though."

"That is fine," Karma said. "So long as they are focusing there, we can push up into the heart of the city without much trouble."

"We should still send help," Xin Zhao said quietly.

Jarvan nodded sagely. "I agree. We can defiantly spare a few squads."

"I can lead them there," Darius said gruffly, as if not to be outdone.

"It is probably better if you stay with us," Karma told him. "You are the only one here that can get the Noxian soldiers to listen."

"What does that mean?" Darius demanded.

"Let's not" Jarvan stared, before he was cut off by the Chief.

"The _Dawn." _He only said those two words.

"Defenses around there are thick," Garen told him. He was consulting a sheaf of paper, probably a report. "The enemy is well fortified. An attack will be difficult."

"Good thing is, VI and her forces are around there. That greatly adds to the amount of troops we can field there," Jarvan added in.

"The _Forward unto Dawn _is our top priority," Chief reminded them. "We cannot let them take control of it." In truth, the Chief was worried about the Doctor Stanwick reactivating the ship. While it was certainly ground locked, if the weapons were turned back online there would be no way to recapture the city.

"Of course," Darius said. "We will not let them have it."

As if to make a le to his words, a massive hissing noise filled the air, and it was soon accompanied by an incredible boom.

"What the hell was that?" Cortana asked as the Chief pushed his way to the edge of the command center.

He could see the _Dawn, _rising high above the rest of Piltover. And, just in front of it, he could see a massive, gangly walker. Its flanks were made of dark metal, slightly purplish in colouration. Its head was open, revealing something that looked eerily like an eye. It glowed with green energy, the after-effects of a recent firing. Another weapon was mounted on platform on its backside, firing into the air at a pelican gunship, which was trying its hardest to avoid the massive mechanical monstrosity.

"A scarab," the Chief breathed out.

"Welp," Cortana said cheerfully, "this just got a whole hell of a lot harder."

* * *

><p>'Tis been a while, but that's because I needed to make sure this chapter would be cool. This story is nearing its conclusion, and I can't see myself writing more than six chapters for this.. so yeah. I'm taking my time now.

**On a completely different note, I've begun thinking of new story ideas. I kinda enjoy fanfics, and apparently some people like what I write. I've been toying around with another HALO story, A Warhammer 40K story, or a LOL/Prototype crossover. If anyone has any preferences, or any other (better) ideas, let me know either in a review or PM. **

**So, thanks, everyone. **

46. Chapter 46

Chapter 46: Gun pointed at the head of the universe

VI swung the ranger around, tossing it into a group of similar ranger-pattern mechs. They toppled over, successfully stopping them from pinning down her last heavy weapons team.

She turned, and blocked an energy blade directed towards her heart with the back of her fist. The ranger raised its arm-gun, so VI pushed it away before quickly closing back in. She punched it once, twice, and then three times, the last hit shattering its armour into its component pieces.

"Hey! Marcus!" VI shouted, but heard no response. "Marcu â€" " she tried to call out for a second time, but she was cut off as a beam of energy slashed across her shoulder plate, scoring a hit and nearly slicing it in half.

"Whoa!" Vi turned towards the origin of the shot. Without thinking she charged up her gauntlet, the pipes on the back steaming as it charged up with static power. She unleashed it all in a sudden burst, jetting her forwards to her target.

Her powered-up fist led her straight into the first jackal-pattern mech, her gauntlet passing easily through its fragile exterior. She closed her hand around whatever mechanical heart filled the automaton's chest, and crushed it.

VI had to pull herself back, since she had lodged so deeply into its chest. She quickly turned to the next jackal, bringing her fists together before lashing outwards with them.

She left two fist-shaped craters in the mech she punched, killing it outright. The extra force from the blow carried outwards to the last jackal, denting it badly and knocking it backwards. She moved up to it, took a long look at it, before using her armoured heel to crush its face.

"Marcus!" VI shouted for a third time. "Answer me, damnit!"

"Here!" the return cry came from somewhere vaguely to her right. She turned that way, and glimpsed her officer in the heat of combat. He was dual-wielding revolvers, spinning around enemies before unleashing a barrage of shots into their unprotected flanks.

"Marcus! I need you to take unit echo and move it around to â€"

"You expect me to move in this mess?!" Marcus shouted back, incredulous. He had to weave around to dodge a red sword, before emptying the last of his rounds into a mechs abdomen.

"- to research platform B," VI finished, utterly uncaring of what Marcus had to say. They had to pull their own weight, now, or the allied attack would surly flounder.

She looked up. She wasn't particularly sure how the attack could possibly succeed with_ that_ around, though.

The police force under the enforcers command had gotten word from the allied command that they would need to secure the platforms and research center around the _Forwards unto Dawn_, in order to properly take back that quadrant of the city. The allies would be free to focus on the heavily-fortified main entrance, and clearing the massive vessel itself.

Of course, VI thought it was all entirely crazy to the point of suicide, which was noteworthy because she liked crazy. The enemy had a massive walker thing â€" she was told it was called a 'scarab'- and it was shooting everything that came in range with weapons bigger than she had ever seen.

But she had accepted nonetheless. Her forces, knowledgeable in the terrain of Piltover and further augmented by her own criminal knowledge, had snuck past the firing arc of the massive beast and engaged a portion of its defenders.

It was proving to be an incredibly hard fight, as the enemy was well suited to this kind of combat. There were three platforms she needed to secure, as well as the research center. One platform was somewhat under her control, while the other was heavily contested, but all other objectives were firmly out of her reach.

She knew she could do it, but she wasn't sure the allies had that time. Not with the big thing in the way.

Another fusillade of shots shook her from her reverie. An emplaced gun position further up the angled _Dawn_ was firing down at her forces, and causing general havoc with her plans.

She sighed, and pointed her gauntlet at the heavy gun. Her gauntlet began targeting, a line appearing as it charged up with steam power.

It launched itself forward of its own accord, streaking towards her designated target. She smashed into it, and the gun cracked into pieces.

She turned upon the rest of the heavy weapons team. She first blocked a strike for her face, before following up with a kick and two punched.

She refocused on the next enemy. After dodging its rather pathetic lunge she delivered a fierce uppercut, creating a massive rent in its armour frame.

The ranger looked down at itself, and VI simply tipped it over and let it fall.

"Okay," VI said to herself, searching around the battlefield for her next target. That did not take too long. The research center, one of her targets, was a fairly large building near the actual vessel. The two were connected by a bridge-like structure that stretched for many meters. The bridge was occupied by roughly a squad of jackals, each one discharging their potent beam rifles into the fighting below.

VI made her way down to the connecting bridge, taking care with the odd and foreign angles of the space vessel. She could hear the sounds of battle; the characteristic whine of plasma weaponry, the booming of shotgun shells, the snap of snipers and the dull booms of the massive scarab.

She hopped onto the grated metal top of the bridge, hearing it creak under her weight. She hopped a couple of times, rolling her neck and shaking out her arms to loosen up.

And then she started running. She swung her arms for maximum effect, her feet pounding across the crisscrossed metal.

Jackals that were on the bridge began to look up, confused at the reverberations originating from above their heads. A few tried to shoot up, through the ceiling, but VI was agile enough to dodge the beams that speared upwards.

She ran for a little bit longer, until she was certain that all the jackals had focused their attention upon her. She skidded to a halt, the contact of her armoured heel sliding on grated metal throwing up sparks.

She then punched downwards, heavily denting the metal covering. She gripped the now dented metal, and pulled, peeling back the sheet until there was a massive gap.

The enforcer tossed the piece of metal and jumped down, landing on a jackal below. The mech was killed outright, but there were still plenty of its companions left.

Each one swung their rifles around, the power coils that ran the length of the weapons charging up.

VI quickly snatched up the metal slab she had torn out of the ceiling, and held it in front of her. The first of the powerful beams lanced right into the metal, slicing almost right through it. It held, though, saving the Piltover enforcer from being skewered right through.

VI moved back, a step at a time. The jackals fired again, and many more beams managed to go straight through the metal.

In response, the enforcer slammed the makeshift shield down into the ground and rolled back. Further beams lashed out but failed to find VI.

She used the brief escape time to slam her fist into the metal flooring of the bridge. The bridge rocked with every blow, but stayed firm.

There was a suctioning noise from behind VI. She turned around to look, and saw that the door at the end had opened up. A large figure stood in the open doorway, staring out at her.

She grimaced and turned back to her work, this time focusing her attention on the struts that held up the ceiling. She tore through the ones on her left, and then the ones on her right.

The creature behind her growled electronically as the first jackal moved around the shield.

VI punched the ground three times in quick succession, finally hearing a groan of stressed metal.

She got up, a lance of plasma slicing right against her thigh. She ignored the pain and turned, beginning to run towards the open doorway.

The creature in the doorway grunted and shifted, raising one glowing arm towards her.

VI brought her fist back in response, letting it charge up with static power. She could feel the ground beneath her feet shift.

Suddenly, almost abruptly, the bridge began to give way. All the beams directed towards her suddenly sliced skywards as the jackals began to fall. The rest of the bridge began to fall piece by piece, and VI had to run just to avoid it.

The large mech shifted its other arm, a massive block of metal, around to cover its braced body. The weapon it sported glowed ever brighter, in anticipation of firing.

VI let loose with her gauntlet, the built-up power springing her forwards like a human rocket. She powered right into the mech and, despite being braced, it was knocked backwards by the force of the blow.

She flipped around the stumbling automaton and landed with a thud on the floor of the research lab. She felt a few new bruises on her body, but knew she had no time to stop and recover. Not while there was an active hostile in the room with her.

Quickly getting back to her feet, the enforcer raised both her fists. She bounced lightly from foot to foot, waiting for the hunter-pattern mech to make the first move.

It did, but it was not what VI had expected. It raised its cannon arm again, and prepped it to fire.

"C'mon," VI complained as she decided to take matters into her own hands. She charged for the creature, feinting right to throw it off guard before delivering a devastating right hook.

The creature brought its shield up just in time to stop the blow, and VI felt her fist rebound from the thick metal. She stumbled back, shaking her fist.

The hunter swung its shield around, hitting VI in the chest. She was thrown back, hitting some sort of console with a thud and a shower of sparks.

"I don't get paid enough for this," VI grunted as she rose up again.

The hunter took two, massive bounds towards her and swung its shield down in an unstoppable arc.

VI didn't even attempt to stop the blow. She weaved aside, taking advantage of the momentarily compromising position to deliver a punch to the automaton's midsection.

The hit had no visible effect on the creature. It dislodged its impaled shield and turned back around to face her, so VI was forced to back pedal to give herself more room.

The hunter swept outwards with its shield-arm, trying to catch VI in the broad attack. The enforcer was not about to be caught off guard, however, so she ducked low as the shield lashed out.

The hunter grunted in annoyance as its latest attack failed. It took one step back, in order to prepare for another lunge.

The enforcer did not give it that chance. She struck out with her fist, slamming into the hunter's shield. VI had built up the steam pressure in the gauntlet, and so this time the hit did not bounce away. A pressure wave of excessive force powered her hit, leaving a fist-shaped dent in the slab and rocking the hunter back a bit.

She punched again, this time with her other fist which had the same amount of pent-up energy. She achieved the same effect as before, further denting the massive defense shield.

The creature tried to shift itself and shake VI off, but it could not risk moving its shield around and leave its body open for attack.

But it did not matter. VI threw one last punch, and finally broke through the massive slab of metal. Her fist mangled it thoroughly, and with one more swift motion she tore it from the beast's arm.

The hunter reeled back, trying to put some distance between it and the enforcer. VI merely followed up with another uppercut, creating a rift in the metal of its chest.

The automaton tried to club VI with its cannon-arm, still crackling with energy. VI sidestepped and grabbed the arm, pulling on it. She placed her other hand on the mech's chest, and redoubled her pull.

In a shower of sparks, the arm came loose. The automaton tumbled back

in distress, while VI was left standing with a massive arm in her hands.

She swung it around, using it as a makeshift weapon. The cannon arm hit the mech and finally knocked it over, making it fall to the ground with a massive boom.

But something so large would not die so easily, as was evident from its electronic cries of distress. It reached out with its remaining arm in vain, attempting to get itself back up.

VI walked over to it, only stopping to grab the massive shield. It was very heavy, even for her, so she struggled with its weight. But that only meant she was certain it would fit her purposes.

She hefted it over the head of the mech. She stared the creature right in the eyes, searching to see if it understood what was about to happen.

She slammed the shield down with all her strength.

The cutting edge was sharp, and it pierced through reinforced exoskeleton, armoured frame, and even metal flooring with little trouble. Almost instantaneously, the metallic sounds of distress died off.

"That was harder than expected," VI said to herself, stretching out her arms. She touched her side, trying to pinpoint her newly-acquired bruises and determine how bad each was. She turned around to face the rest of the research control room, still gingerly feeling her side.

A group of rangers stared at her.

"â€|oh," VI said, the hand at her side dropping. She stared at the automatons for several long seconds.

"Okay," she said, slamming her right fist into the palm of her left hand, "who's first?"

There was a tense pause.

There was a bright flash of blue light, and a crescent of scintillating blue energy sliced through the room. In a matter of seconds, each ranger was bisected.

A moment later a figure burst through the wall of the room, silver armour flashing as he landed with one arm outstretched.

"Why, you little kill stealer," VI said grimly to the newcomer, continuing to punch her fist into her palm.

Ezreal straightened up and backed away from the enforcer. "Sorry! I didn't know you were in here."

"Just because you got fancy new armour, doesn't mean you can just barge in and take my kills- "

"Please don't hurt me," Ezreal muttered, his arm cannon held protectively over his head.

VI broke out into laughter. "I'm not going to punch you, dummy," she managed to say. "Just help me out and take control of the system here. Ya know, nerdy things."

"I take some offence to that," Ezreal said as he tapped one of the consoles. "What do you want me to do?"

"Ohâ€¦ uhâ€¦," VI thought for a moment. "Is there, like, an 'explode' button?"

"I don't think this comes with one of those, sadly."

"There should be something to control the research platforms, though, right?" Vi tilted her head. "You can make those fall, right?"

"You mean collapse them? Sure, I can try," Ezreal responded, tapping more controls.

VI watched him work. His fingers danced across the console, turning knobs and pressing switches, lifting levers and moving switches. His other arm ended in a cannon, much like the hunter mech, so he couldn't use it to work. The rest of his body was covered in flexible silver plates, powered by an energy coil mounted on his back. VI had to admit, it was pretty cool.

"Wait a sec," Ezreal paused in his work. "Why am I the one doing this? You're way better at this stuff than I am."

VI punched her palm again.

"Got it." Ez resumed his work.

The enforcer tapped her earpiece, opening the channel she had with her police forces. "All officers on the research platforms, leave them right now unless you wanna be paste in a few minutes." She paused, then added, "thanks."

"Nice," Ezreal said, moving the final switch into its terminal position. "Now we just have to deal with the small army on the bottom floor."

"â€¦You tell me about that now?"

Ezreal looked confused. "I didn't mention it before? My bad."

"It's gunna be your bad when your face is pulped," Vi told him.

Ezreal shifted back again. "At least we don't have to fight the big thing outside, right?"

VI let her hands dropped and looked outside the floor-to-ceiling window. "Your right," the Piltover enforcer told him. "Dealing with the scarab â€" that's the Chief's job."

"Man, being a hero must be tough," Ezreal said, earning him a cuff from VI.

* * *

><p>The pelican flipped around, dodging the last salvo of anti-air plasma fire directed at it. The pelican unleashed its own weapons upon the vehicle, heavy weapons and laser firing at the monstrosity.<p>

The mech took the blows and seemed to shrug them off, just like it had on the last three runs. It moved back in a strangely scuttling manner, and took aim with its main cannon.

The beam of energy split the air as it powered towards the pelican drop ship.

The pelican rolled, but the beam followed with uncanny precision.

Just as the energy was about to pierce the armoured hull of the flier it went into a dive, and the beam just missed it by a hands breadth.

The Master Chief watched this all with a frown. He had been directing Viktor with as much skill as he could muster, but the scarab was learning incredibly quickly, and was even managing to outwit him.

It was surprising, to say the least.

"Viktor, go wide," the Chief told him over the comm channel they shared. "Keep out of range of its weaponry. Come back in and laser the front-right leg."

"Understood," Viktor told him with his classic metallic voice. A sharp click followed as the link closed once again.

The scarab turned abruptly, and fired another volley at Viktor's pelican. The shots went wide, but the scarab continued walking forwards as it chased him down. The bullets became more accurate, forcing Viktor to make even more risky dodges, which in turn took him further away from the battlefield.

"What the hell?" Cortana said aloud, before switching back to the private comm. "Did that thing hear us? There is no other way it would know to chase Viktor out of range."

"You think it can tap our channels?"

"Possibly," Cortana said.

"Possibly," The Chief repeated, unsatisfied with her unsure answer.

"Probably," Cortana corrected.

"â€|A re-phrase was not what I was looking for," the Chief told her.

"Alright then," Chief said, turning to his team. "Comm silence from now on."

"What about Viktor?" Riven inquired.

"He'll have to watch closely. We can't risk anything."

"Okay," Yasuo began, clutching his battle rifle, "then what's the plan of attack?"

"You have killed one of these before, yes?" Thresh looked at him.

"Yes," Chief told him, but didn't bother to add his misgivings. The only other time he had done it in this world, he had a clear-cut advantage with his position. Every other time, he had enough heavy munitions to make it a simple fight.

He did have his Spartan Laser, though, and that should be sufficient to disable a leg and get on board. From there he could disable it in the way he knew best.

"Everyone needs to spread out," the Chief told his team. "Riven, you're with Thresh on the leftside. Don't engage, but distract it by running. Use your shields to block incoming fire, but do not let anything hit directly."

He turned to Graves and Yasuo. "You are on the right. Use your ranged weapons as a distraction, but it is unlikely you can pierce its armour. Stay in cover at all times."

Chief took out his Spartan Laser, and checked its charge. It only had enough power for another two shots, so he'd have to make them count. "I'm in the center. I'll take its legs out while its focusing on the rest of you."

His team acknowledged his order with nods, although there were plenty of unsure backward glances. Every one of them had faith in the Chief, though, so none of them voiced their qualms.

The scarab continued to focus its attention on the pelican, which was out of its range by now. However, as soon as Riven and Thresh began their distraction, the scarab switched its focus to the people running by it.

It turned slightly, and aimed its head downwards. It did not appear to be about to fire; rather, it looked like it was watching them.

"That thing disturbs me," Cortana told him as they watched the creature. The Chief only grunted in affirmation.

He started to move forwards, making sure to get in effective range of his weapon. There was no point in risking a miss, especially when he lacked the weaponry to otherwise deal with the mech.

The scarab stood there, stock-still, watching. Suddenly it looked up, and began to shuffle around.

It was then that Graves and Yasuo made their presence known. They emerged from cover, firing their ranged weapons up at the large automaton.

The Chief dropped to one knee as he entered the effective range of his weapon. He set it firmly on his shoulder, and took aim at the

scarab.

He breathed out, making sure to steady himself as he pressed down on the trigger. At the same time, he prepared himself mentally and physically to begin sprinting. He had a bit of ground to cover, so he would need to run fast enough to board the scarab.

The red line of his weapon connected with the scarab's leg, slowly intensifying as it prepared to fire.

The scarab's head turned again, this time glaring right at the Chief. It began to open up like a mechanical flower, and gathered green energy to the eye-like center.

"â€|Shoot it quick," Cortana told Chief. "It knows we are here."

The Chief fired, the red laser springing into existence. It stabbed through the air, towards the scarab's legâ€|

â€|which was no longer there. The scarab lifted it up at the last moment, and the laser passed through empty air, fading away to nothingness once it failed to hit a target.

"That's not possibleâ€|" Cortana whispered.

"â€|Time to go," Chief said as the scarab's main weapon charged up to full.

He started sprinting, lowering his weapon in order to make it easier to run with.

The scarab beam hit where he had been just moments before, sending pieces of cobblestone into the air with a violent explosion. The beam immediately began to track towards the sprinting Spartan, tearing into the concrete with and adding to the overall destruction.

The Chief kept just out of range of the beam, but it was drawing ever closer. Pieces of falling stone hit him, lowering his shields by the smallest of fractions.

Suddenly, the beam stopped as the energy supplying it gave out. The Chief dug his heels into the ground to halt himself, sending up a cloud of smoke.

"It can definitely think," Cortana noted. "Do you thinkâ€|" she trailed off.

"That it carries a part of you?" the Chief asked, but already knew that was exactly what she was wondering. "Doubtful. Previous containers were used as leader-units, not as front line combatants. That would be too risky for a limited resource."

"_You're a_ limited resource," Cortana pointed out.

The Chief did not answer.

The Scarab let out a long, electronic whine, and promptly began to move. It moved towards the Spartan, each firm step crushing the ground beneath it. Its head cannon had closed, but the weapon on its back seemed ready to fire.

Distraction fire from the rest of blue team continued to hit the large walker, but it was intent on the Spartan. Clearly it knew what the greatest threat was.

A volley of heavy weapon fire, directed from the sky, slammed into the armoured hull of the scarab. It stumbled fractionally, but not nearly enough to knock it off balance. It did, however, stop the large walker from firing.

The Chief took the scarabs re-focus as his chance, and dropped to one knee again.

The back-mounted weapon of the scarab fired in precise bursts, and a few managed to clip the pelican dropship.

Viktor was forced to fly low, weaving dangerously out of the way of the plasma. Black smoke trailed from the back portion of the ship, which the Chief took as a bad indicator.

The Chief fired, and this time the laser connected with his target. The powerful laser punched into the scarabs leg armour, ripping armoured plates off with explosive force.

And yet, miraculously, the scarab stayed standing. Some fire was licking across the exposed steel of the leg, but it seemed solid enough to keep the creature up.

The scarab's main weapon opened up again.

"This sucks," Cortana told the Chief as he started sprinting again.

The scarab was learning, though. Its beam sprung out from its eye, this time aiming for the ground in front of the Chief.

He tried to stop, to turn, but the beam hit him regardless. The high-intensity energy impacted against his shield, and the two power fields connected violently.

The Chief was thrown forwards, his shields instantly drained and warning sounds blaring through his helmet. He landed on the ground quite a ways away, staring up at the sky.

He tasted something coppery in his mouth, and his vision was slightly blurry. His shield bar was flashing, and there was static dancing across his armour.

"You've been injured," Cortana told him. "Not badly, butâ€¦ not good, either. Broke â€" "

The Chief hit the side of his helmet, stopping Cortana.

"Right, sorry," she said.

The Chief glance backwards.

The scarab was looking down at him, its eye-beam still charged and primed to fire.

The Chief scrambled up, and prepared himself to dodge. He bided his time, though, so he could figure out where it would fire and dodge accordingly.

The weapon glowed brighter, but it seemed it, too, was waiting for its opponent to make a move.

The scarab's head was suddenly thrown off target, pulled away from the Chief. The beam discharged into the ground, as whatever force pulled the head kept it in place.

The Chief moved back, and looked to his left.

Thresh was standing in the open, his scythe attached to the neck of the scarab. The chain warden yanked it out, pulling free armour plates and returning to his hand, where he then spun it like a lasso.

The back-cannon on the scarab tacked towards the specter, glowing with an internal light.

There was motion on the right, and the ronin sprung into action. He ran fast and low, with his blade held low. Its orange edge was bright, and his silver armour caught the dim sunlight.

The scarab turned its head to look at Yasuo, but it was not yet ready to fire. Its back-cannon switched targets, this time aiming at the ronin. It fired, wickedly hot plasma racing out to intercept the swordsman.

Yasuo threw up a wind wall, and the bolts disappeared into the roiling slab of air. Yasuo ran a bit closer, and gestured out wildly with his weapon.

A tornado sprung out, gathering in potency and size as it traveled. It impacted against the back-right leg of the four-legged walker, shifting loose some plates.

But the tornado was not meant to damage the walker, only to give Yasuo enough momentum to spring upon his prey. The wanderer dashed forwards to the leg, riding the twisting winds. He slashed and sliced up the leg, tearing up the armour with its plasmic edge.

He reached the top, and then dived gracefully landed back to the ground, landing on his feet in an almost feline manner.

Suddenly, a pulse of power was emitted from the scarab. The range was evidently very small, as it did not reach the Chief, but it knocked Yasuo far away from the vehicle.

"Interesting close-range defensive mechanism," Cortana noted.

The scarab gave a high-pitched whine and tried to move back, focusing intently on the now-dangerous ronin.

The outlaw came into view this time, dead-on with the now damaged leg. He inserted a special canister into his weapon, pumped his shotgun once, and then fired.

The explosive charge smashed into the leg, puncturing the frame and

crumpling it like it would a can would. Intense fire sprung from the wound, licking up the appendage.

And yet it still did not fall. Its leg, despite being essentially useless, did not tip the creature over. It moved its front-right leg back more than unusual, and that accomplished in maintaining its balance.

And then it tried to turn in an oddly shuffling manner, trying to face away from Graves and Yasuo.

The exile sprung into action, running at the scarab. Her runic blade was at full-size, and Riven held it upwards to avoid scraping it along the ground.

The scarab opened up its beam canon, intent on reducing the new threat to ash.

Riven dashed to the left just as the creature fired, dodging the main explosion while her runic shield absorbed the rest of the damage. As the beam tracked towards her, she jumped and flipped to avoid the worst of the beam.

Perhaps the scarab was content in just driving away the threat, but it was not meant to be. Thresh, at the same time Riven was dodging, tossed his scythe out and hooked it onto the front-right leg. He pulled himself towards it, at the same time throwing out his lantern.

Riven did one, final backflip over the energy beam. She cleared the powerful, concentrated plasma and grabbed the lantern. She was immediately transported to Thresh, who was just in front of the leg. At once she sprung upon the leg, stabbing her enhanced sword into the metal.

And she activated the runic power, pumping it directly into the leg.

For a moment, nothing happened. Then the plates began to fracture, with bright, glowing green lines crisscrossing the leg. After several more seconds the leg imploded, causing an instantaneous crater to form in the leg. It almost appeared like a massive bite had been taken out of it.

But still, the scarab stubbornly held on, although it was clearly at the breaking point.

Graves and Yasuo came up beside the Chief, panting heavily. They looked to him expectantly.

The Chief waited for a few moments, allowing for Thresh and Riven to get clear. Once he was certain they were in the safe zone, he grabbed an object from his thigh and activated it.

Cortana made the calculations of the angle he would need to throw the object at. He drew his arm back, the plasma grenade glowing brightly in his hand.

He tossed it, sending it up in a high arc. It travelled through the air, bright as a star, before landing on the joint that connected the

front-right leg to the body.

And then it detonated. While the blast was fairly small, considering the other munitions brought to bear against the walker, it was enough to finish it off. The plasma vaporized the joints, and finally the scarab collapsed.

Blue team could feel the shockwave of the collapsing scarab with intensity.

"Time to finish it," the Chief told his team. He walked towards the downed mech.

But it had one last trump card. Shimmering, yellow hexagonal shapes sprung into being in front of the scarab, seemingly in random locations. Yet more sprung up, connecting one their flat edges, slowly resolving themselves into a dome of shimmering light.

"What's that?" Thresh asked, his voice still unnervingly neutral.

"Holy shit," Cortana said aloud. "They have a bubble shield. They actually took a bubble shield."

"I don't understand," Riven said.

"It's invulnerable at this point," the Chief told them. "We could enter itâ€¦"

"â€¦But then we would all be knocked back like I was, right?" Yasuo finished. "I really don't want to be hit again. I'm sure I'm going to feel that bruise for a while."

"I think the shields gunna close soon," Graves said, indicating with his weapon.

The round shield was almost done fully encompassing the down vehicle. The Chief gritted his teeth, knowing it would be difficult to finish the thing off now.

And then he noticed the silver object, trailing white smoke, descending towards the scarab. It flew fast, and managed to slip just inside the bubble shield before it closed.

Previously, the pelican drop ships re-created by professor Stanwick used munitions already present aboard the *Dawn*. The Chief knew that first-hand, as he had taken the brunt of the impact of one. VI had then enhanced them once she had gotten ahold of the pelican, adding a second-stage explosive detonation, similar in effect to what her gauntlets could produce. Viktor had enhanced them further, once he had gotten his mechanical hand on them. He had added his own, special tip to the end, which added a two-phase energy explosion, like his laser used.

The Chief had prohibited the use of said weapons, though, because the blast radius (which VI and Viktor both did not account for) would reduce inhabited areas to inhospitable rubble.

But Viktor was technologically capable, and must have realized the purpose of the bubble shield. Nothing from the outside could get

inside, but by the same token nothing from the inside could get outside.

That meant the scarab was now trapped inside the bubble with a high-explosive rocket.

The explosion was muted by the dome of raw energy, but it was still loud enough to hear the three rapid detonations. At roughly the same time there was a bright flash of light, bright enough that the Chief's visor automatically polarized. It was quickly smothered by clouds of roiling smoke, thick and black.

The bubble shield began to flash, each hexagonal panel changing from yellow to different shades of red.

Panels began to collapse from the dome, allowing smoke to pour out. More and more panels fell until, finally, the entire dome collapsed and a thick wave of smoke blossomed outwards.

It crashed against the Chief, the thick cloud parting around his legs. The rest of his team was slightly buffeted by the sudden force, but harm was done.

"Good job, everyone," he said out loud, still looking at the skeletal remains of the massive walker.

"He means to say that he is really really impressed by that," Cortana elaborated.

"Uhâ€¦ thanks?" Yasuo replied.

"Don't take that as a complement," Thresh told him. "It wasn'tâ€¦ for you."

"That's kind of rude," Yasuo said.

The Chief took a step back, allowing his team to banter with each other. He placed his hand to the side of his helm, and tried to raise Viktor on his comm.

"Yes?" Viktor answered, his voice laced with static.

"Viktor, how's the pelican?" Chief asked him.

"It will not fly much longer," Viktor told him, his voice dissolving into more white noise.

"Good," Chief said, "I need you to do one more thing."

* * *

><p>Garen swung his sword around, cleaving the nearest mech vertically in half. He pulled the sword free and half-turned, blocking an arm-dagger with his shoulder blade before impaling the unfortunate automaton on his sword.<p>

Garen grunted and looked behind him, only to see another pair of mechs closing in fast. He let go of his sword and punched the first mech in the face, knocking it back briefly.

He quickly tackled the second machine, smashing it against the ground. He punched the creatures midsection twice, satisfied once he saw sparks violently leap across the creature.

Getting back to his feet, he fixed his attention upon the other ranger.

It raised its arm and fired, a full burst catching the Demacian in the chest.

Garen activated the primitive shielding of his armour, waves of electricity wreathing his form in order to temporarily increase his durability. He went in close for the kill, delivering a swift elbow to the rangers head.

The ranger dodged back, raising its weapon one more time.

Garen swung his fist down, delivering a devastating hammer punch to the creature.

It crumpled to the ground, dead, and Garen moved to retrieve his weapon. It took a tug to free the large sword, but once it was free he gripped it firmly with both hands, and prepared to fight again.

"Garen?" the Prince's voice echoed loudly through his ear. "Damnit, how does this thing work?"

"It's working fine," Garen told Jarvan gingerly. "Is something wrong, my prince?"

"Wow, your loud," Jarvan said. "Don't yell."

"Of course, my prince."

"The Master Chief has asked us to make a push for the main entrance," Jarvan said. Sounds of fighting could be heard over the radio piece. "He is ready and in position to breach the ship thing."

"Understood," Garen said, glancing over the battlefield. "That might be somewhat difficult."

"Don't worry, I have utter faith in you."

"Thanks," Garen muttered as the radio fell silent. He looked around, trying to find a good way to rally his troops and make a push.

"There may be a small problem," Lux told Garen.

Garen looked down at his sister. He had no idea where she had come from, but that was what she excelled at.

"Define 'problem'," Garen asked her.

Behind them came the sound of something being brutally smashed apart, and the thumping sounds of something large.

Garen turned around, almost hesitantly. He had learned that when it

came to the automaton army, it was a good idea to expect the worst.

There, in the ruins of a wooden structure, was a stalker tank. Its thick legs were impaled in the soft ground, and its rotary canon was spinning up as it took aim at the multitude of allied targets.

"These things like showing up out of nowhere," Garen muttered to himself, gripping his sword tightly. He would need to have his troops scatter and reform, possibly have them pin the creature in place. He was sure he could pierce its skin, but it might be difficult without proper weaponry.

"Observe," a foreign voice said from behind the large Demacian.

Garen half turned, just enough to see the master of the wuju style brush past him.

Yi walked calmly up to the large mech, unsheathing his long katana and holding it with both his hands. He began to run, completely on balance despite the incredible length of his blade.

The mech started to fire, it not having yet noticed the Ionian headed straight for it. Bullets tore into lightly armoured troops, felling them before they could react.

Yi sprung upon the automaton at that moment. He swung his katana before dashing with incredible speed, landing several strong cuts on the machine.

The mech stopped firing and started to turn, recognizing Master Yi as a threat and preparing to eliminate it. Large bullets spewed from the weapon, tearing up concrete.

But no bullets hit Yi. He ran fast, faster than any normal person should have any right to. The mech tried to follow Yi, but it panned too slowly to catch the fast swordsman.

Yi ran in, slashing across the automaton's leg with his sword. He cut the steel in half with an expert stroke, the weakest points of its armour visible to his multi-goggled head mask.

The stalker tank reeled back and slammed outwards with its leg, catching the samurai full in the chest. He was launched back several meters, landing heavily on his back.

The stalker moved forwards, its weapon once again spitting death into the allied crowd.

Green light sheathed Yi's body, and he rose back up. Shrugging off the injury he had sustained, he ran right back into combat against the machine.

The tank thought to knock Yi away with its leg again, and made a move to do so.

Yi hurled his sword like a javelin, watching it soar over the reaching leg and impaling into the metal of the creature's flank.

He dove into a front roll, shifting his body away from the stalkers thrust. Once it moved its leg to adjust, Yi sprang back up and dived over the outstretched leg. He kept his arms stretched out reaching for the sword he had thrown a moment before.

He felt his fingers brush against the handle and he began to twist, using the sword as a pivot. He flipped himself up and over the automaton, and in the same motion ripped his sword clear.

He landed on top of its back, his head down, legs partly bent, and sword parallel to the ground.

He stayed like that for a moment before rising up. He straightened himself up, and pointed his sword towards the ground. He shook his head and smiled, as if everything was just some sort of game that amused him.

He rotated the katana smoothly, before pointing it downwards. He gripped it with both hands, and gently pressed down.

Yi's katana was saturated with the power of Wuju, and ancient fighting technique nearly impossible to master. While the sword itself was no more well-crafted than any other sword, Yi could shunt a portion of his power into it to make it far more formidable than normal. In this situation, it allowed the katana to pierce through the stalker-tanks metal coverings as if it was tissue paper.

The sword pierced through layers of plating and framework, eventually impaling the main heart-crystal that powered the entire mech.

The stalker tank managed to crawl a few more paces before collapsing, its entire front section smashing into the dirty ground. Yi slid off the thing, landing upright with his katana over one shoulder, a smug smile on his face.

"That was quite impressive," Garen told the master swordsman. If he had been forced to go up against the large mech, he was not sure he would have been able to disable it in good time. While he knew he was a competent swordsman and a great fighter, such graceful techniques were far beyond him. "I almost thought it had you, there."

"Doubt is the greatest enemy," Yi told him, sharing a piece of wisdom he had gleaned in Ionia.

"Right." Garen nodded. "Stay close to me now, though. We need to make our way to the drummer and get him to signal our forces to push." Garen indicated their destination with his hand.

"My blade is yours," Yi promised.

Garen glanced around briefly for his sister. He had seen her go on ahead while he watched Yi, but he couldn't be sure of where she went exactly. The movement of so many troops was throwing dust up into the air, making details slightly obscured.

At least he had thought to keep the standard-bearer by the musician, if nothing else but for easy identification in times like this.

He moved forwards with sure steps, avoiding swirling ash and random,

zooming bullets. He passed by a trio of archers, who seemed to be vainly firing their bows into the ash clouds. Tapping one on the shoulder, he told them to move back and regroup.

He wasn't entirely sure if they would be able to actually find their compatriots, but when the drum sounded they would be able to coordinate easier.

Two large figures stepped into Garen's field of view. The first roared an electronic whine, clearly a challenge for the commander of the dauntless vanguard.

Garen stepped forwards and gripped his weapon with both hands. He started running at the automaton.

The zealot swung out with its sword, sweeping out wide so as to catch Garen.

Garen ducked under the blow with surprising swiftness, and delivered a decisive cut to the enemies' abdomen.

The automaton stumbled. Garen rose up, raised his blade high above his head, and prepared to deliver a killing strike. He was stopped by a heavy burst of gunfire that ripped across his back, several of the plasma bolts breaking through armour to burn his skin.

He grunted and turned, swinging his blade in a murderous arc. The helpless ranger caught by the blow was shattered.

He turned back to the zealot, just in time to see it throw a punch at him. He deflected it hastily, but the strike dented his bracer.

Garen looked down, saw his damaged forearm armour, and frowned. He looked back up at the featureless face of the mech, and swung his sword. It carved into the mechs chest, before lodging half way in.

The zealot sparked, but was still somehow alive. Garen gave a grunt and tugged the sword back out. In the same motion, he spun around and brought the sword back down again on the creatures head, separating it from its body.

It tumbled to the ground, revealing Master Yi and the other zealot engaged in close combat.

The second automaton tried to cut Yi open, but Yi blocked each cut with expert precision. the zealot swung down, and Yi parried the blow aside.

It gave the Ionian only a small window of opportunity, but he used it to his full advantage. He sliced diagonally downwards from the right, and then did the same from the left. He followed up with two more vertical slashes, each quick as lightning.

The mech fell to the ground, its chest completely opened up.

Garen nodded to the swordsman and resumed walking, his breath coming out slightly faster than before. The face-paced fighting was taking its toll, even on a champion like him.

Suddenly, a loud, electronic rumble sounded across the battlefield.

Yi halted first, as did Garen a moment later.

"What was that?" the Ionian asked, his question clearly directed towards Garen.

Garen had to think for a moment, before realization hit him. "A counter charge. The enemy is leaving the _Dawn._"

"â€|That does not sound so good," Yi said thoughtfully.

"It's not," Garen said, shaking his head, he resumed walking towards the banner. "We are no prepared for a massed charge from that angle."

A second electronic horn sounded across the battlefield, but this time from a completely different direction.

"That's not possible," Garen said, staring at the source of the second horn.

"They may have given up the eastern quadrant," Yi told him. "they came here to crush the bulk of our army between their combined forces."

"Riskyâ€|but possibly worthwhile, Garen said grudgingly. It was a perfect tactic for this scenario, but Garen had not thought they would do such a thing while the space ship was under their control.

"Their skills are inferior," Yi told him, trying to reassure his larger companion.

Garen turned around. Knowing he may not have the time to reach the musician, he opted instead to shout. "TROOPS OF DEMACIA! REFORM UNDER THE BATTLE STANDARD!"

He couldn't tell if anyone had heard him, for there was far too much noise to make anything out. He could make out people gathering, thought it was very clumped and unorganized.

Plasma fire redoubled in intensity, with random bolts sizzling through the air.

He stumbled as something grabbed his ankle. He half turned, only to see a dismembered ranger on the floor clawing at him.

Yi brought his slender blade down on the creature's skull, ending its ragged existence.

Garen nodded his thanks and continued forwards.

And then, as if stepping into the eye of a hurricane, the dust in the air vanished. It seemed clear as day, and Garen couldn't quite figure out why that was. Nonetheless, it allowed for a clear view of his gathered forces â€" a few lines of Demacian spearmen, augmented with Noxian great-swordsmen and supported by Ionian casters. That did not

account for the full force, though. Not even close. Many troops had yet to rally, or were otherwise casualties in this hectic maelstrom of battle.

He moved towards the center line. He began to give out orders at a rapid-fire pace, assembling his soldiers and having them face the simultaneous charges.

The enemy was several dozen meters away when he heard the whooshing noise, something he associated with a large projectile. In fact, it was a very familiar noise.

A large, thin projectile zoomed over his head, trailing white mist. It was long and tapered near the tip, while the end fanned out. White crystals, perhaps snowflakes, seemed to drop from it.

"A crystal arrow," Yi said with admiration.

The arrow flew forwards and detonated against the automaton ranks. There was a bright flash of light, and suddenly dozens of rangers were encased in ice, while others were simply killed outright.

Another projectile flashed by Garen's vision; a swirling bola made of bluest ice. It traveled slower than the arrow, but impacted with terminal force. Several large spears rose upwards out of the impact point, devastating the main rank of rangers. The automatons closest to the impact were frozen in ice, while all the rest were coated in a thick layer of slowing frost.

"They made their ranks too tight," Yi said firmly, but Garen was no longer paying attention to the master of Wuju.

Another force was running into battle. They bore the motley of colours that signified the combined allied force, but these troops hadn't been assigned to the main battle. Two figures led the charge; an armoured woman on a boar and an archer that ran alongside her.

The reserve was finally coming in.

As if summoned by the Freljordian charge, a series of drums began to beat. They were faint, indicating they were quite a ways away, but they were unmistakable: Noxian drums. The ones that had been assigned to other half of the army.

"Swain broke through," Garen said out loud, to no one in particular.

A looked up at the sky, and saw the faint rays of sunlight. He looked back down, and gripped his blade tightly.

"Troops! The enemy has abandoned their defences to take the battle to us, but they underestimated us! Come, it is time to break their ranks!"

And with that, Garen charged.

* * *

><p>The pelican hovered unsteadily, its ramp extended fully. It was connected " haphazardly, the Chief might add " to a maintenance hatch that had been ripped open. Apparently, this area had before been a research platform. The platform was now pieces of scrap on the ground, for some unexplained reason. In its fall, It had ripped struts free and revealed entrances to the Forwards unto Dawnthat normally would not open.

It allowed for easy access by blue team, and the Chief was making the most of it.

"Please, hurry up," Viktor urged. The pelican drop ship had been heavily damaged, and likely would not fly again for a while. He was eager to get it back on safe ground so he could begin repairs.

Chief stepped off the ramp and into the open doorway. He snapped his assault rifle up and quickly scanned the pathway, but nothing was in sight.

He waved the rest of his team forwards.

Once each member was inside the hatch, the pelican began to lift off. It tilted unsteadily, its rotors trailing thick smoke. With a whine, the air vehicle sped away.

"Graves, stay in the back," Chief commanded, knowing it would be better to have the shotgunner watch their backs.

"I don't like staying in the back," Graves said, but obeyed regardless.

"Yasuo, Riven, stay just behind me," Chief continued.

They nodded their affirmation and took their places.

With that, the Chief set off into the bowels of the _Dawn._

Much of the travel was easy goings, as they enemy seemed to have abandoned the vessel completely. The only real obstacles were pieces of rubble that had gathered after the crash, but it was not nearly enough to impede their progress.

"Cortana," the Chief asked after a while of traveling, "are the lifts online?"

"I'm detecting minor power transfers, so it's not likely all the lifts are online," she said.

"But it's possible that one is online," the Chief stated. "The central elevator." It was only a guess, but the most likely one. The enemy was going to be on the bridge, and so would have powered up the elevator that would allow for heavy-lifting.

Chief waved his team to follow and turned a corner. It was another long hallway, but what interested Chief more was the maintenance corridor hatch set into the right wall. The door did not open at his approach, as was standard for doors of that type. He could only attribute that to a lack of power.

It was hardly a problem. The Chief simply forced the doors apart, and

walked through.

It was dark inside the narrow corridors, unlike the main decks that had emergency lighting. Chief activated his helmet-mounted flashlight, providing just enough illumination.

Anyone not an engineer aboard the dreadnought would have quickly become lost in its winding maintenance corridors, but the Chief knew the labyrinth-like layout to traverse it with ease.

They emerged in one of the engineering compartments, an area that fed a multitude of pipes into the central reactor. Or would have, had the central reactor not gotten cut-off in the slip space incident.

Following the yellow-and-black striped pipes, the group was led to another hallway, this time formed of metal grating and steam pipes. The Chief led them through for a small while, emerging in a circular room with several elevators arranged in a circle.

The Chief stepped up to the central elevator. True to his assumption, it was online and running.

He pressed the button that called the elevator.

"Soâ€¦" Yasuo started. "What're we waiting for?"

The Chief didn't respond, and a moment later the elevator dinged, signaling its arrival. The doors did not open automatically, but once again the Chief forced them apart and made way for his team.

Riven stepped in first, tentatively. "How does this work?"

Thresh stepped in next. "However it works, it works."

Yasuo and Graves entered without comment, which was unusual for them. Not that the chief was complaining.

The Spartan stepped inside last, and pressed the indicator for the bridge. The doors closed very slowly, and the lift started up with a jolt.

The central lift was not like the elevators spread across the ship that ran bottom-to-top; rather, this one transported from the back of the ship to the front, along the spine, making it more of a moving platform than an elevator. If the Chief was totally honest with himself, he would have to say he was fairly surprised it still worked at all. Half its mechanisms would have been cut off in the incident, unless it had been repaired by the automatons.

The lift shuddered the entire trip, an indication that the transport was not yet fully repaired. The Chief did not care, however; so long as it got them to its destination it would be fine.

The elevator dinged, signaling that it arrived to its location. The doors opened part ways with a groan of strained motors, but stopped midway. Once again, the Chief had to pry open the doors to make enough room for his team to pass through.

He passed through the open door with his weapon raised. His team

piled out behind him, following his movements closely. The Chief led them down a large, brightly-lit corridor, and then around a bend that terminated in two heavy steel doors.

Two zealots stood in front, preventing blue teams entrance to the room beyond..

The mechs took quick notice of the newcomers, and rotated their great red swords into a downwards guard position.

The Chief stopped and called Graves up to the front of the group.

"Light them up," was all the Chief had to say.

He opened fire on the zealot pair with his assault rifle as Graves fired shotgun shell after shotgun shell into their metal hides.

The automatons had been expecting honourable melee combat, and so were unprepared for the ensuing fusillade of solid rounds. They were torn apart as they stood, their carapaces shattered open.

"Graves and Riven, stay on the right side of the doors," Chief ordered.

>Thresh and Yasuo, stay on the left. Go in right after me."<p>

They all stepped into their allotted positions, and the Chief stopped right in front of the door. He pressed his hand against a scanner that was, miraculously, still operational.

The door hissed open, and the Chief rushed inside.

The bridge looked exactly how to the Spartan assumed it would, although there were more crates around than usual.

The Chief's attention was drawn to the command platform, and upraised area that overlooked the rest of the bridge. Past the four zealots on guard was a figure in heavy armour, standing in front of a console. A large block of machinery sat beside him, glowing power cables connecting it to the bridge.

Chief took a step forwards, and the man in heavy armour turned.

He took a look at the Chief and sighed.

Chief recognized the man as Marin, the commander of the automatons that he had fought in the Freljord and saw in Noxus.

Marin fully turned, unlocking a large pistol from his thigh. He did not speak, instead waving the Master Chief forwards.

"Blue team," Chief said, "Take out his bodyguards."

And with that, the Chief charged.

The zealots all swung their swords, thinking that they could stop the Spartan if they were fast enough.

They could not. The Chief ducked under the first blow and vaulted over the second mech. He landed with a thud, but continued to move

forwards. He shoved the second last mech aside, side stepped the last zealot in his way.

Marin raised his pistol and managed to get a shot off, the plasma bolt bouncing off the Chief's shields.

The Chief was on him then, but still did not stop. He lowered his shoulder and slammed into Marin, knocking him off the edge of the upraised platform.

Chief could not stop his momentum, though, so he fell too. He recovered gracefully, swinging his assault rifle around and bringing it to bear on his target.

Marin was almost up when the Chief fired, and he took a full burst on his side armour.

The Chief rolled aside to avoid Marin's return fire. He took cover behind a bank of computers, and blind fired over it.

Plasma bolts hit the Chief's cover, melting holes in the metal and cracking other parts achinery.

The Chief vaulted over the machinery, ripping off a piece as he did so. He charged towards the automaton commander, raising the slab of metal like a makeshift shield.

Plasma impacted against the metal, bringing holed right through it as if it was not there at all. However, it stopped any of those rounds from draining the Chief's shields any further.

Marin tried to side-step the Chief before he could reach him in close combat, but the Spartan was far too fast to avoid the blow completely. He was knocked back by the force of the punch, a dent in the center of his chest.

He raised his pistol once more, blind-firing in the direction of the super-soldier.

Most of the rounds hit the Chief, draining his shields down to a quarter before he swung away, out of danger. He fired his last rounds at the commander, the powerful UNSC bullets eating away at his foe's heavy armour.

Marin reached for his hip and removed a spherical device. He rolled it calmly to the Chief's location, and stepped back to take cover himself.

The Chief heard the sound of something rolling and peered out, watching the small orb roll towards him.

He jumped over his crate as the grenade exploded. While he was out of range of the main explosion, the heated plasma still managed to drain the last of his shields.

He grunted as he was knocked forwards, stumbling on his feet.

Marin rose up from his cover and smashed his fist into the Chief's helmet, snapping his head back.

The Chief took the force of the blow and ignored it, counter-attacking with a right hook.

Marin ducked away, but the Chief kept on him. He swung out again with his right, forcing Marin left, before smashing Marin's head with the frame of his AR.

Marin's own helmet protected him, but defiantly left him dazed. The Chief pushed him back quickly, giving the two some space.

He looked down to his assault rifle, which he had ruined with that last strike. He tossed it aside and drew out his magnum, taking swift aim.

Marin raised his pistol, too, drawing a bead on the Chief.

There was a sharp tang of ozone as several rings of blue appeared around Marin's feet.

The automaton commander looked down, as if he was just as surprised as the Chief to see them there. He tried to step forwards, but the rings tightened against him. He struggled but, with a final flash of light, he disappeared.

The Chief lowered his weapon as his motion sensor pinged clear of enemies.

* * *

><p>It took a further hour before the Forward unto Dawn was cleared of hostiles and the area could be declared as safe. However, even with the main objective of the allied force accomplished, that meant nothing as the enemy commander still existed. As such, all the allied war leaders had gathered in the bridge of the star ship, standing around one of the holographic tables in the lower quadrant.

The Chief allowed them to talk, since he was too preoccupied with Cortana to fully listen in. After Marin's disappearance, the Chief had searched the bridge for useful Intel. Of course, he had found none, but he had learned that the block of metal had been collective of some sort. Rather than commanding the automaton army, it had been focused on reactivating the ship "a futile objective. Regardless, the Chief had secured the last piece of Cortana and was waiting for it to fully integrate.

"Demacian forces can consolidate around the _Dawn, _since we got here first," Prince Jarvan said. He was leaning on his spear, saying that the tiled ground of the bridge was annoying him.

Swain shook his head. "I have to say no to that proposal."

"Piltover forces can keep security of the ship, since that is what they have doing the whole time," Karma said. "That is what they have doing the whole time."

"I agree to this," Caitlyn said. She had arrived with Swain's main force, and had gotten proper medical assistance on the ship. She was swathed in bandages, some of which were stained red, but she was alive.

"As to our next plan of action," Ashe began, "What do we intend to do?"

"First, we must consolidate our forces," Jarvan said. "Then, we push towards Zaun."

"So the enemy really is in Zaun, then?" Caitlyn asked, not really needing an answer.

"It makes the most logical sense," Xin Zhao said from his position behind the Demacian prince.

"It is still that we heard nothing from them the whole time, though," High Councilor Kolminye said.

"The enemy is more technologically advanced than us," Lux said in a sing song voice. "They could have easily cut off communications and taken over the city."

Swain nodded. "Many of my ravens could not reach the city, or did not return at all."

"Why did you sending messenger ravens out to Zaun?" Jarvan demanded.

Swain met his gaze, an unnamed emotion glinting in his eyes, but he did not respond.

The Chief was distracted by a mountain of scrolling white text that flashed across his visor. He processed the multitude of information as Cortana presented it.

"Is there any way we can figure out their main base of operations?" Ashe inquired.

"Did we not just do that?" Sejuani said sarcastically.

"I mean specifically," Ashe insisted.

"We have a problem," Chief told the assembled leaders. They all looked to him and hushed up immediately, as if accepting his authority silently.

Chief stepped up to the holographic table and took removed Cortana's chip, smoothly inserting it into a slot. The table lit up as a grid of blue flashed across it, and a glowing UNSC symbol floated atop the table.

That earned a few impressed looks and stunned expressions. They had lived with magic and steam-punk style hextech for their entire lives, and so simple technology like this impressed them.

The symbol flashed once and was replaced by a map of Valoran, lifted from the Chief's archives by Cortana.

Cortana's figure appeared a moment later, waving her hand at the map.

"There is a small person," Sejuani noted. "Why is there a small

person?"

"Awww!" Lux exclaimed. "She's so cute!"

Cortana ignored the both of them. "I've detected a power-surge in Zaun," she said, indicating the power buildup with a flashing icon. "The power is of a type the Chief and I have witnessed before, although we have thankfully not experienced it."

Kolminye caught on; she had been in the Chief's memories on the day he had tried out for the Institute. "You can't mean â€" "

Cortana's holo-figure nodded. "These power-levels and build up patterns are reminiscent of a Halo ring charging."

No one else seemed to understand, but the Chief was sure to correct that. "A Halo ring was â€" is â€" a device to annihilate life in a large radius."

The shocked silence spoke volumes.

"I've been in your mind, and there is neither the technology nor power to complete on of your rings," Kolminye insisted. "Let alone store on â€" that thing was massive!"

"It does not have to be the same," Chief said with a shake of his head. "He has been collecting runes this entire time, probably to make it run better. He was in Kalamanda, collecting crystals, and even controlled a nexus for a period of time."

"He could be using magic to power it," Cortana finished. "It need not be the same mechanism at all, only that he based the idea of it off of that device."

"This is a joke, right?" Jarvan demanded. "You can't be serious."

Kolminye's expression was enough to confirm the seriousness of the situation.

"But why?" Karma asked hoarsely. "Why would he want to kill everyone?"

"To create, first you must destroy," Viktor said. He walked into the room with sure steps, metallic clicks accompanying his footsteps. "I have also detected a power build up in Zaun."

"I don't understand how this is possible. I mean, to re-create such destructive technologyâ€|" Caitlyn seemed to be at a loss for words.

"Stanwick was always obsessed with getting things right," Viktor told the group. "He always gets angry when others interrupt his work, and you all have done a rather good job of that. For him to see his dreams to fruition â€" for him to rule a world of pure machine â€" he needs to tear down what already was."

"That's insaneâ€|" Swain whispered, even the master tactician unable to quell his feelings at this impossibility.

"Whether or not it's true is irrelevant," Chief said to them. "We can't risk it. If we are wrong, we lose. Forever."

An uncomfortable silence greeted his words.

"An attack must be launched," Viktor said, breaking the long silence.

"We did not escape this battle unscathed," Jarvan told him wearily. "Our forces our down by half, and those are just preliminary numbers, not the full tally."

"Many more will be lost pushing the attack," Darius finished for him. "Not to mention the fact that we have no way to get there."

"But we do," Cortana said. She replaced the map of Valoran with a close up of Piltover, and focused in on the docks. "The automatons came here in water vessels, so we can use those to get back. And I'm sure the Piltover police forces have their own boats."

Caitlyn nodded hesitantly. "Yes—we do. There are also commercial vessels in the harbor, if they have not already been destroyed."

"I can't say I see much of a choice," Karma said. "It's either die to his machine —"if it even exists —" or die invading his shores."

"Is it decided, then?" Jarvan asked. "We are going make one final attack?"

Swain held up his hand. "How large is the range of this device?"

"It will probably kill everyone on Runeterra," Cortana stated.

"—And how long until it powers up?"

Cortana's figure shrugged. "That I can't say for sure, but no longer than a day."

"Then what are we waiting for?" the High Councilor said. "We should start loading the ships."

"This will be the single greatest loss of life in Runeterra history," Jarvan said.

"Most won't make it back," Swain continued.

"And winning is very unlikely," Ashe muttered.

"And we're probably all going to die," Karma told them.

"Oh, come on," Cortana said as the Master Chief removed her chip from the table. "It wouldn't be fun any other way."

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

"Professor, Marin demands to know why you summoned him back like

this," the adjutant said, clearly nervous.

"Tell him I do not care for his concerns," Stanwick told the woman. "Small people like him have been ruining my plans from the beginning, and now I have to take things into my own hands."

He stopped working for a moment, and added, "Have him assemble the honour guard in government courtyard and prepare for a counter-attack."

"A-a counter attack, s-sir?"

Stanwick screwed the last bolt into place, and moved to the case beside him. He opened it up and removed the Static Shiv rune, carefully placing it into the final rune-compartment in his machine.

The rune hissed as the machine began to feed off of its generous supply of static electricity, powering it up.

Stanwick rose up, wiped his hands on his once white lab coat, and looked upon his creation.

"Do you think I would be using this back-up plan if things were going fine, you stupid girl?" Stanwick snorted at the stupidity of the adjutant. "Of course he will need to counter attack."

Stanwick's eyes glinted dangerously. "After all, I'm sure at this very moment the Master Chief is preparing for one final charge."

* * *

><p>Longest. Chapter. So far.

Hot damn.

Anyways, just wanted to say that i'm kinda leaning towards the 40k story. Halo/WH is kinda overdone, and most of the 'good' plots are taken. I'm still fully open to suggestions, though!

So, review if that's your cup-of-tea, or just enjoy the many words on the browser. C Ya!

47. Chapter 47

Chapter 47: Once more unto the breach

The Final Battle, p1

* * *

><p>The Master Chief moved swiftly to the docking area of Piltover, launch point of the invasion force. It had taken some coordination, but he had been able to hammer out a battle plan that would allow the greatest number of troops to land upon Zaun's shores and achieve a beachhead.<p>

At that point, it was a matter of finding Stanwick's main base of operations and killing him.

The Chief decided that he would be the one to kill the professor. The things he had did to his AI, as well as the times he had tried to kill his team—that was enough to earn the Chief's ire.

Dozens of other troops, in the colours of Noxus, Demacia, Piltover, Ionia, and the Freljord, all boarded transports to take them across the bay.

If Chief had mentioned the major city-states fighting alongside each other back when he still fought in the Institute, it would have been treated as a joke. There had been no hope for healing the rifts between the nations, as there was nothing they had hated more than each other.

And now they were all fighting together, if rather shakily. Still, it was an incredible process.

This would be the testing point. If they succeeded, then everyone was one step closer to getting along. If they failed, well—then everyone would be dead anyways.

Chief swerved past a group of Piltover policemen, all of them trying to board a police gunboat tied to one of the wooden docks.

The Chief continued past. His vessel was further out, as it was one of the transport vessels the automaton army had used to transport them over. The ship was an ugly machine, created for simple efficiency rather than elegance. It had a flat bottom, surrounded by low railings and an extendable ramp. Two engines were strapped to either side, connected by a curving bridge-like structure.

Despite its status as a transport vehicle, though, it boasted some fairly impressive armaments. On top of the bridge connector was a double-barreled cannon, and two plasma cannons were mounted on either side.

The Chief had to admit, the transporter was impressive.

Several of his team members were loading crates into it, each filled with munitions and supplies that would come in handy if the invasion force needed to dig in. Most importantly, though, were the Chief's own weapons, which he figured would come in handy.

Riven was leaning against the post that the vessel was moored to, casually ignoring the rest of the team while they went about working.

The Chief moved up to her. "Is something wrong?"

"No, nothing," she said, but the Chief caught her subconscious glance towards the far shore.

"We'll make it," Chief reassured her.

"I know," Riven said, but seemed to be convincing herself more than anyone else. "But what happens after that?"

"I—" the Chief was not sure how to respond. "Everything here will return to how it was, and you all will go back to the

institute."

"You all," Riven noted. She nodded twice, as if to reaffirm what she had heard, and then turned away.

"Well, that was confusing," Cortana said.

Chief shook his head and entered the vessel.

* * *

><p>The landing force launched not long after. The Piltover bay roiled with the movement of a hundred ships, and each was filled with troops.<p>

There was little organization in the boat formation, mainly because there was a lack of time for such detail. The battle plan was simple, too; it simply involved a three-wave landing, with each wave securing major objectives. After that, there was a long shot that they would even be able to find the facility.

Blue team was in the first wave, as was natural for the super-soldier. Their objective was to establish a beachhead, since they were the most potent force in the allied army.

It still wouldn't be easy, though.

There was an explosion somewhere to the right of the vessel.

The Chief looked over just in time to see a gunboat flipping into the air, smoke pouring from its insides. It landed back into the water with a heavy splash, water skyrocketing upwards.

The Chief looked back to the opposing shore. A line of ships were zooming into battle, clearly a counter-attacking force with the intention of blunting the allied assault.

"Yasuo," Chief said, pointing back, "Mount the gun."

The Ronin hurried to obey, the sight of so many ships making him unwilling to argue.

The Chief then tapped the side of his helmet, opening a radio channel to the other army leaders.

He received nothing but static. He tried again, but the white noise remained on every frequency he switched to.

"I'm pretty sure they are jamming our radios," Cortana told him. "It's actually fairly strong."

"Great," Chief said, thinking hard. Without any way to send out signals to the rest of the army, it would be incredibly hard to get a successful landing.

Then it hit him.

He tried thinking hard, although he doubted that it would work. He tried establishing a connection a projecting words, but found it difficult with the amount of explosions going off around the

boat.

_Chief? Is that you? _High Councilor Kolminye's voice was loud and clear in his mind.

Yes, Chief replied, finding it a little hard to keep his relief from his thoughts. _The radio is jammed._

Is it? I could not tell.

The Chief mentally sighed. _The enemy is going to try to break us apart, and make our landing impossible to coordinate. The few units that land will be surrounded and destroyed._

â€|_what? _Kolminye sounded confused. _I didn't understand half of that. The connection is getting fuzzy._

"â€|damn," Cortana said. "The jamming may extend to telepathic communication, too. Stanwick defiantly would have thought of a counter-measure for Summoners."

Kolminye, tell everyone to follow blue team closely. The outer edges of our formation need to tuck in â€" we need to make a speartip.

_Speartop, got it, _Kolminye confirmed.

_Spear â€" just follow my lead, _Chief told her. The fuzziness was becoming more apparent the longer the conversation wore on, so he cut it short.

Yasuo just then opened fire with the main cannon, sending rounds of sizzling plasma into the rapidly shrinking gulf between the two fleets.

"Riven, mount the side guns," Chief ordered. As she moved to obey, the Spartan made his way to the crates of weaponry piled along the sides.

He went to the rightmost one, already knowing what weapon he wanted. He reached inside of the metal container and pulled out an SRS99-S5 AM.

He swung the large sniper rifle into position and peered through the scope. He could clearly see the lead gunboats, all of clear Zaunite design, although each was festooned with automaton weaponry.

He aimed lower on the boat, allowing the crosshairs to focus on the bottom-right quadrant of the ship's hull.

Chief adjusted for the rock of his transport, the tilt of his target, the speed of the win, the distance, the waves, and even the plasma heating up the air. For a normal sniper, such an act would have taken time and calculation to make a perfect shot, or otherwise several shots.

It took the Chief mere moments to line everything up. He fired a single bullet. The powerful round slammed right on target, puncturing through the target ships' hull.

Almost instantly the vessel detonated, the bullet having hit the main engine. The explosion tore the ship apart, Sending parts scattering back into the rest of the fleet.

"Awww yeah!" Yasuo shouted. "First blood!"

"Shut up," Graves yelled back at him. He was crouched against the railing, his shotgun settled atop of it. He would need to wait until the ships got into close range before he could actually be of use, due to the short-ranged nature of his weapon.

The Chief switched targets, aiming for the next closest gunboat. While he trusted the armour-piercing capabilities of his sniper rifle, he knew he would need more than one shot to completely disable the twin-engine automaton transport ships. It was far more efficient to instead take out the gunboats, which were better armed and faster anyways.

Chief fired two more times, and another two ships went up in flames. "Thresh, get this ship moving faster." He pointed with his finger to a location on the horizon. "We need to be ahead of our lines and break through theirs."

"I love how it's always us doing the hard stuff," Yasuo said as he took a pause from shooting.

"I love how you always complain about the usual," Riven answered back dryly.

The Chief ejected his current magazine and smacked another into place. He racked the bolt on the side and resumed his shooting, this time making adjustments for his faster travelling speeds.

Trails of fire sprung up from the rearmost vessels as they launched objects high into the air. The objects spiraled up on contrails of fire before arcing back down, towards the sole oncoming transport.

"Rockets," the Chief said, mostly to himself. "Thresh, evasive maneuvers!"

"I beg your pardon?" the specter asked.

"Dodge," Chief clarified, swinging his rifle up to the descending heavy munitions.

Thresh began to swerve the vessel around, powering towards the enemy ships in an S-pattern.

Even so, the Chief could see that some of the rockets would land dangerously close by.

He would not allow them to do so. He fired his rifle, hoping to intercept them before they could cause any damage.

One was destroyed by the high-powered shot, exploding harmlessly above them. The Chief fired at another, but the shot barely clipped the rocket " just enough to throw it off its trajectory, though. He fired at a third one, successfully destroying that one too.

A last rocket hit the water just meters away from blue teams boat, and it detonated underwater. The resulting shockwave buffeted the ship, knocking it aside and almost threatening to tip it over.

Thresh rotated the control-wheel sharply, bringing the ship around and keeping it level with the water.

And then they were among the enemy vessels.

Hell broke loose, as the enemy quickly realized which ship this was and who it belonged too. Plasma rounds stitched through the span between boats, which at some times was less than a meter.

Blue team fired back with uncanny precision, heavy plasma rounds ripping holes in the enemy. Graves' shotgun shells had a nasty effect on the boats, too; they opened up fist-sized holes that quickly began to fill with water.

Chief simply continued firing with his sniper rifle, making sure to make every last bullet count.

The transport vessel was not coming through unscathed, though. The plasma had the same effect on them as it did on the enemy, so the vessel quickly became pitted with burning holes.

Thresh continued to weave, though, providing some effective cover from the myriad of bullets. He maneuvered the transport in ways that made it hazardous for the enemy to fire on full-auto: he position himself in between enemy ships, so that when he weaved away the enemy rounds would hit their own allies.

The Chief spared a glance back. The first of the enemy ships were making contact with the vanguard of the allied forces, but were failing is slowing down their progress, which was good. Chief could also see that the allies were focusing in on his vessel, tightening their formation and making it much harder for the enemy to scatter them.

Although, the Chief realized that could become a problem once he saw another volley of rockets leap up from the rearguard ships. The allies would most likely not try and shoot down the weapons " or miss " and they could cause carnage in the massed ranks.

"Thresh, break through their lines," Chief commanded.

"That is what we are doing," Thresh stated, but gunned the engine nonetheless.

"We need to hit their back-line ships," Chief told him, snapping off another shot with his rifle.

Suddenly, another transport vessel slammed into their side. It rocked them heavily, and the waves from the impact quickly sent both ships aside. However, in those brief moments, a group of automatons jumped on board.

Three of them, in fact. The problem was, the Chief had no idea what pattern they were. They resembled zealots in their general framework, but that was where the resemblance ended. They were clad in ornate

armour, all sweeping curves and brightly-lit decorative struts. Their helmets had high crests, and in their hands they clutched energized spears.

Graves gave a grunt of shock as one swung its weapon down dangerously close to him. The Chief fired his rifle just in time, though, the incredibly heavy round puncturing through its helmet and knocking it over the edge into the roiling sea.

The second one ran at the Chief, swinging down with the pole-arm. The Chief reacted instinctively, bringing his current weapon up in a guard position. He under-estimated the power of the energized spear, though, and it separated the sniper into two sizzling halves. It even managed to rake across the Spartans shields before he could dodge back.

The new mech " the Chief decided to call it an honour-guard pattern automaton " tried to impale him on the business end of his spear, but he danced aside.

The automaton tried again, but this time the spear began to spark violently.

Chief realized he was in front of Thresh's upraised position, and reached out to grab the weapon. He forced it aside just as the sparks reached a crescendo, and a beam of energy sprung out from the tip. It lanced into the transport that had smashed into them moments before, instantly melting it into slag.

Cortana whistled as if impressed. The Chief quickly tore the weapon from the automaton's grasp, slamming the hilt of the weapon into his opponent's midsection.

The honour guard did not react at all, instead reaching forwards with a clawed hand.

The gap between the two was small, so the Chief could not bring his new weapon to bear on the foe.

And then, suddenly, a volley of plasma fire from above shredded the automaton.

Chief looked up at Yasuo. "You could have punctured the hull."

"Hey!" Yasuo yelled, taking aim at the last remaining honour guard and annihilating it, "I saved you! Show some appreciation."

"We totally had that!" Cortana yelled back as the Chief made his way to the fore of the ship.

He gripped the spear with both hands, and tried activating it.

Nothing happened.

A flurry of shots poured into the transport, and while most missed, enough hit to cause the structural integrity of the vessel to decay.

"Try gripping it lower down," Cortana suggested. "Like the mech did."

Chief changed the positions of his hands on the staff, and felt a sort of pressure plate beneath his lower hand. He applied pressure, and felt the haft of the weapon hum with potential energy.

A bright green beam of energy sprung out, going in a straight line to the Chief; aimed location.

The Chief panned the weapon quickly, making sure to sweep wide with the beam before it could run out. The questing beam hit multiple ships, ripping through the back end of one, the midsection of a second, and the fore of a third.

The beam lost its intensity before it could count the last two as casualties, but the first was not spared. The beam had cut through it cleanly; piercing whatever engine ran the vessel.

It detonated much like the other gunboats, flipping up into the air and metal flying violently outwards.

The second ship in line, wounded as it was, was entirely unable to evade its compatriot's debris. The ship suffered critical failure and exploded also, further adding to the carnage.

The last ship sailed right into the smoky conflagration, exploding deep within its depths.

The violent detonations caught two other vessels and ripped them apart, leaving a wide open gap in the enemy formation.

"Thresh," Chief said quite unnecessarily. The specter was already speeding towards the location, although the transport wasn't moving as smoothly.

"We cannot keep this up," Thresh informed everyone. "This boat will not last."

As if on cue, several beams of violent energy smacked into the ships front section.

Graves yelled and rushed back as the hull rapidly warped from the heat. Smoke poured out of seams and cracks in the metal, obscuring the vision of those on board.

"This 'ain't good," Graves shouted back. "And â€" Shit, I think we're taking on water!"

"Straight ahead," Chief said calmly.

The boat powered over the debris-laden water even as it began to take on said water. With the front of the ship a ruin, it began to list forwards.

The Chief was under no illusion that it would last much longer.

"Yasuo," he called up, "I need you to be ready and tornado on my right."

"Heh?" Yasuo sounded almost confused "as was the usual.

"Riven, be ready with that cannon," Chief continued. "Don't let up for a second."

Riven silent but resolutely gripped the firing mechanism.

"Graves, I want rapid buckshots."

Graves pumped his firearm.

One second past, and then two.

And then they were out of the roiling cloud of black smoke. On cue, everyone opened fire.

Yasuo's tornado sprung out, floating across the water as it traveled. True to the Chief's predictions, the tornado took on water, turning it into a swirling hurricane. It crashed into a bunch of boats, flipping some over and capsizing others.

On the left, Riven's cannon let out a staccato beat as it pumped rounds into half-seen enemy vessels, dissuading them from stopping to draw on bead on blue team's ship.

Graves let out a wave of bullets. While each individual shell lacked staying power, all they needed to do was punch holes into the hulls of ships and cause them to take on water.

Chief himself readied his spear, letting out periodic bursts of the green plasma. Each of his shots was aimed to the rearmost vessels, hoping that they would be the ones with the mounted rocket-pods.

To be honest, the Chief couldn't quite tell if they were or were not. They all appeared to look the same, and were armed the same, so it was really just guess work based on Cortana's position data.

Under normal circumstances, the Chief would have had the boat make several circuits just to be sure he could destroy every possible threat. Unfortunately, with the ship in its current state all he could do was hope that the initial volley was enough to disable the main threats, and give the allied fleet a fighting chance.

The ship began to rock and judder, an indication of its poor condition.

But they had to keep moving, no matter what, or they would fall apart in the middle of the ocean.

"Yasuo, can you use your wind powers to move us faster?" Chief inquired.

"They don't work like that," Yasuo said, concentrating more on shooting his turret than focusing on the Chief.

"Yasuo, get off the turret and make a tornado behind us," Chief ordered.

"Come on," Yasuo complained, but quickly followed the request as the

Chief moved towards him.

The Chief took the Ronin's place at the turret, swinging it back around to face the fore. "Try your best," he told Yasuo.

Yasuo grumbled the entire time. He thrust his hands out towards the open sea, and tried concentrating.

Wind slowly coalesced around the ship, but it wasn't a significant amount. Yasuo's powers were meant for offence, after all.

Still, it helped speed the ship up to the point where it was practically gliding over the water. They passed by the last few straggling ships, and were in the clear. Not that the Chief had them stop, he couldn't even attempt it.

There was a sharp whine, like something charging up. A second later there was a large blast ahead of them, sending up a geyser of water.

The Chief tracked the turret around, trying to locate what just fired. Cortana helped out by highlighting things in the general firing direction.

He found what he was looking for. It was a turret-like structure, much like the towers that adorned the Fields of Justice. It even looked the same, although this one was much larger.

"A defensive system?" Cortana inquired out loud.

The Chief remembered that she had no experience with towers. Unfortunately, he didn't have the time to explain things to her in detail.

But he would need to make disabling the turret his top-priority. Allied ships would be shredded if caught unawares by the large structure.

Another magical blast hit the water, but missed the boat completely.

"Angle Thresh," Chief called out as an idea struck him. "Angle the boat thirty-five degrees that way." He pointed for good measure.

Thresh complied, angling the boat slightly but not letting up on the speed.

The Chief noted with some annoyance that the water levels on the boat were up to his teams' ankles. The boat was clearly slowing down, too.

Another bolt of magic lashed out, and this time it hit directly where the Chief knew it would: right behind the boat.

He could mathematically see how the turret was targeting, the micro-corrections it was making. He used that knowledge to his advantage, so once the bolt missed and created another geyser of water, his ships rear was towards the explosion.

The blast sent out a wave of water, and " while not very large "

it gave the ship just the kind of boost it needed.

Because of the vessels current speed, the wave lifted it off from the water, and so for a few seconds it was flying rather than sailing.

And that was enough. Now that they were in the air, if only slightly, Yasuo's wind powers gained a bit of strength. The ship shot forwards like a Covenant Ghost with an active booster engine; more than enough to cover dozens of meters in seconds.

The boat touched back down on the water roughly, shaking few some sheets of metal as it did so.

"Brace!" Chief shouted to his team as the vessel suddenly bounced off the water. The wind surrounding the ship was acting like a repellant for the water, so it once again shot through the air.

This time, the Chief could see no water beneath their hull. They finished the last stretch to shore, and when the ship descended again it landed on hard, grainy sand and gravel.

The boat scrapped across the beach, creating a massive furrow. Pieces of ship fell loose and scattered, the boat's structure not having been designed with such stress in mind. Smoke poured from the hull with frightening intensity as the prow buckled even more, flattening like a can.

Chief was thrown back as the turret was torn away, but he managed to keep one hand on the weapon and another one the framework of the ship.

Finally, after a few dozen meters, the boat hit a dune of sand and juddered to a stop.

Chief grimaced as pain shot up his side. The landing had been rough, even for him. He rose, making sure to be careful. His right hand still carried the turret, torn and mangled as it was.

It suddenly occurred to him to check the status of his team.

They all answered with words ranging from 'affirmative' to a multitude of multiple expletives, so the Chief took that as an all clear from the team.

Chief's motion sensor pinged, heralding the arrival of enemies. He straightened himself properly and gripped the turret with both hands, one on the handle and another near the front. He rose one leg up and put it on a protruding strut, trying to give himself a more steady position to control the weapon's inevitable recoil.

Half-seen shadows danced through the haze of smoke, and bright lights could be seen approaching.

Chief opened fire, plasma bolts ripping through the cloud surrounding the ship. As he panned the turret around, shadows began to fall and the lights began to go out.

But there were still many more.

His teammates rose from the rubble, drawn by the sound of his shooting. Graves was the first to do anything significant; he fired a shell at the first shadow to draw near to the ship, and it fell like a puppet with cut strings.

Thresh seemed entirely unharmed, but as he was a ghost that was entirely expected. He walked right up to the edge of the ship, and lifted his lantern.

As an eerie glow suffused the air, Thresh announced, "There are no souls here, but many soulless."

"Does that thing count you, too?" Yasuo asked. Even though the Chief could not see his face due to his mask, his smirking expression was entirely predictable.

"No," Thresh stated calmly, ruining Yasuo's attempt at a joke.

Chief continued firing, focusing down targets that strayed too close. He wasn't sure how many enemies were in the area, but there were sure to be a lot. They would have focused their forces here, to prevent a beachhead from being secured.

But that was what the Chief was trying to do, and he wasn't about to let them stop him.

Yasuo began to fire his battlerifle into the smoke, adding to the din of battle. Riven remained the only person to help in the fight, although her melee weapon was a good indication as to why. Regardless, she crouched against a surviving piece of metal rail and got ready to engage in melee combat.

The Chief had to pause in firing the plasma cannon as it grew close to overheating. He didn't let up in shooting, though; instead he pulled out his magnum and fired it with his off hand.

The unseen enemy began to respond with plasma fire of their own, but it was wildly inaccurate. Still, eventually the sheer volume of shots fired would manage to hit something.

Several shadows drew closer, slowly revealing themselves to be ranger-pattern automatons. Chief put them all down with quick headshots.

The plasma cannon hissed as it finished overheating. Once again the Chief was struck by how weird the technology was here; unlike their covenant counterparts, these cannons did not need to vent heat. Instead of being let out, it seemed to have been drawn in- perhaps to further power the weapon.

The Chief felt the desire to open the weapon up and see how it operated. While he usually was not interested in such things " he only really cared about maintaining equipment " he wanted to see how the two technologies blended. He knew Cortana would like to know, too.

But now was not the time to be thinking about such things, he knew that. As the cannon cooled down he gripped it again with both hands, and resumed firing. This time, though, he made sure to use more controlled bursts to stall out the overheating.

A few bolts of plasma managed to hit the Chief, but his shields remained intact. He fired out a sustained burst, ensuring the deaths of another automaton group.

The smoke was beginning to thin, and that could pose a problem. Without the smoke to grant them cover, the enemy would be able to land their shots with noticeably more precision.

"Team!" Chief shouted out. "Time to charge!"

"Whaaaa?" Yasuo sputtered out.

"On three," Chief told them. In truth, he knew that a charge at this point would be incredibly dangerous â€" after all, the enemy likely outnumbered them. Most definitely outnumbered them. However, staying in this disadvantageous position could result in greater casualties.

It felt odd when the Chief thought of his teammates becoming casualties. He'd prefer if no one died, and while charging seemed to be oddest way of going about that, he was sure it would work.

Chief took a deep breath. "Oneâ€|"

A heavy burst of mech gunfire ripped into the cloud, hitting the members of blue team. The Chief's shields took some hits, but were in no danger of being collapsed from such indirect firepower.

"Twoâ€|"

The Chief tightened his grip on the borrowed plasma cannon. He began to lay down a withering hail of heat-based projectiles, making sure to sweep across the battlefield. He knew many bullets would fail to find and kill a target, but it could be enough to distract the enemy before the charge.

"One."

The Chief jumped over the mangled rail, his hands still firmly on the cannon. He heard the sound of boots behind him â€" slightly delayed, he noted â€" so he knew his squad was rushing in as well.

He fired the weapon at the first set of mechs to be clearly revealed, both ranger-class, and both were cut down with shocking ease.

Another pair loomed out of the smoke, raising their weapon in eerie unison. The Chief brought his weapon about in an arc, not letting up on the trigger for even a moment. He riddled the two automatons with bullets, chewing through their relatively thin carapaces in moments.

He could hear the heavy booms of Graves' shotgun. Graves would be in his element here, since he was far more effective up close than at range. Rangers found themselves with gaping holes in their chests as soon as he got near them.

Yasuo and Riven, on the other hand, were both in melee combat. They

were starting to pull ahead of everyone else, but were still fighting defensively. Riven used a multitude of Noxian techniques to shatter the enemy, while Yasuo preferred his wind-based fighting style instead.

Both were brutally effective.

Thresh was lagging behind, but he was the slowest of the group. He was finishing off stragglers and picking off isolated targets, but he mainly seemed to be content to provide support for everyone else.

The Chief stopped for a moment so he could deliver a lethal burst into a group of jackals. He cut them all down, only one of them managing to shoot at him.

A pinging from his motion sensor drew the Chief's attention back to the front. A group of heavily armed automatons were entering the battle now. They seemed to be the new honour-guard types they had seen before, and they walked in perfect lockstep, their grey armour shining.

Chief stopped, but upon looking at the rapidly-heating cannon in his hands, he realized that shooting would not do much. He would cut down two or three at best, but there were at least half a dozen walking in with more rangers behind. And, if his motion sensor was correct, there were dozens more just outside of the smoke-and-dust cloud.

He instead twisted his upper body, and then tossed the cannon from his hands. A normal human would have found the action next to impossible to achieve, but it was easy for the Chief.

The cannon rose up in an arc, but the enemy ignored it. When it landed, it did so with a solid thud. The sand-and-granite combination prevented the weapon from sliding, but the Chief did no mind that.

The mechs stepped over the weapon. In unison, they each brought their polearms down. Electricity danced across the lengths of each.

Chief drew his assault rifle and aimed it at the plasma cannon in one swift motion.

He fired.

There was a bright light as whatever constituted the core of the weapon suffered critical damage. The weapon exploded, detonating with bright swirls of plasma-fire.

A large amount of ground was vaporized instantly, as were four mechs closest to the blast. The remaining mechs were badly scorched, with parts of their body running like slurry.

The Chief put them down with quick headshots.

The rangers seemed oddly disturbed by their dead companions, making it much easier to put them down.

The air was much clearer than it had been before, and the Chief could only put that down to the amount of plasma being fired. He now had a

clearer view of the enemy, and he realized he was woefully outnumbered.

"Hey! We have boats coming in!"

Riven's shout drew the Spartan's attention out to the bay. Troop landers belonging to the allied army somehow managed to break through automaton lines, and were very close to opening their ramps and spilling their human cargo out onto the beaches.

The automatons switched their focus from blue team to the allies, giving the Champions a much needed respite.

"Follow, quickly," the Chief commanded, already moving up the beach. "We need to disable the turret."

"Can't we just rest for a minute?" Graves asked, huffing.

"Rest when you are dead," Thresh mused. "Wait, I am dead and still have not rested."

"You don't have to explain the joke," Yasuo grunted out.

The automatons were forming into lines, vainly trying to stop the allied landing. It was no use, though; the few ships that had survived were now out of range of the heavier weapons and the light weapons on the mechs could not hope to harm them.

So long as they were distracted, the Chief was content.

Blue team moved up the beach, avoiding the majority of automatons. Some still tried to engage them, but they were all small squads and were quickly eliminated.

The turret sounded, and a bright object flashed out towards the battling fleets.

"Must have finally found it's range," Cortana said.

Chief had his team sidestep a large pile of scrap metal, and climb a path that led upwards, towards the turret. The Chief wanted it admit, it all looked ratherâ€¦ utilitarian. Everything was the same drab grey colour and the same design style, and it was echoed by the not-so distant city.

A group of jackals rounded the bend in the path, seemingly alert of blue team. They all fired immediately, but the hasty shots lacked any real accuracy.

Chief stayed still as he fired into the mechs, and Graves mirrored his actions. Riven and Yasuo ran forwards with Thresh just behind them. They cut them down in short order, and they all resumed walking.

Another two mechs were shot down as soon as they showed themselves. It seemed like a poor attempt at guarding the turret, but the Chief wasn't about to complain.

Another bend, and they were still far from the top.

There was a crunching noise from behind the team. Everyone turned around in unison.

Standing opposite from them was none other than Marin, the commander of the automaton army.

Riven immediately tried to push her way to the fore, but was stopped by the Chief's outstretched arm.

"Blue team, proceed to the top and eliminate the turret," he said.

"Whoa, Chief," Yasuo began. "I like epic duels as much as the next guy, but â€"

Chief half turned. "We don't have the time. We need to split up." The manner in which he said it made his team back down instantly.

It was true, though. With the pseudo-Halo ring charging up, they needed to go about this as quickly as humanly - or in this case, spartanly - possible.

They all moved back, but they were still hesitant. One by one they ran up the path, with Riven being the last to leave.

"I'm really getting tired of this, you know," Marin told Chief. He was holding his falchion loosely in his hand.

Chief did not respond, not thinking he needed to. He brought his assault rifle up to his shoulder, tucking it in tight and taking careful aim. With luck, Marin would finally die here and his team would disable the turret on top. That would save time, and furthermore take down the two biggest threats to the allies: the enemy force commander and the single defensive weapon.

Marin ran up to him.

The Chief fired on full auto. At this range, he couldn't miss a shot even if he tried. However, many of the bullets still rebounded off the curved armour plates, the angle of impact not being enough to penetrate the armour.

Some bullets did go through, and each individual hole in the armour leaked red. Marin still rushed at the Chief, though, unperturbed by the wounds.

And then the commander was too close for the Chief to use his rifle. Chief ducked beneath a swing of the falchion, and sidestepped a vicious swing, but in doing so was unable to dodge the kick aimed for his chest.

Chief stumbled back, his shields having taken a heavy hit from the powerful blow. He used the small gap to put away his rifle and draw out his gladius, a weapon that he had not needed to use for quite a while.

Marin lunged out, his sword directly aimed for the Chief's heart.

The Chief parried the strike and followed up with a horizontal slash,

but Marin brought his sword back just in time to stop the sword.

"Are you not supposed to be some sort of assassin?" Cortana asked the man.

If Marin was surprised to hear Cortana, he didn't show it. Not that the Chief could see his face anyways, since he had a helmet on.

"Special operations soldier," Marin said ruefully, as if he regretted it. He immediately slashed out, trying to catch the Spartan off guard.

Chief blocked the strike and punched with his left hand, Catching Marin straight in his armoured jaw.

The enemy commander stumbled back, giving Chief an opportunity to rain blows upon his armoured form.

His gladius hit a weak point in Marin's armour; some piece of rubber coiling. It drew a roar of pain, but the Chief found himself unable to pull it back out. It was lodged deep.

The commander spun around, forcing the Chief to let go of the gladius. Immediately he set himself on the defenseless Spartan, hacking at him like one would a tree.

Chief tried to block with his arm and, while successful in stopping the worst of the hit, his shields still took a draining.

Another swing from Marin forced the Chief to jump back, and a lunge forced him back even further.

Marin took the time to remove the gladius and throw it as far away as he possibly could, keeping the Chief at bay with his falchion.

The Chief briefly considered reaching for his assault rifle, but he would still need to reload it. Marin would be upon him by then.

As if hearing his thoughts, the mech commander charged forwards with his sword in both hands. The weapon crackled with energy, which was a new development.

Chief charged also, a plan formulating in his mind. Marin drew close and swung his sword out in a violent horizontal arc, trying to broaden his attack so that the Spartan could not easily escape.

But escape the Spartan did. He dropped at the last second, sliding across the uneven ground. As he went past Marin he reached out and grabbed his leg, pulling him down also.

Chief stopped sliding and rose up before the struggling mech officer. Chief raised his fists high, and brought them down simultaneously upon the downed enemy.

There was a burst of static electricity as the Chief's shields detonated, wreathing Marin's form in lightning. The lights of his armour faded, and the blade's power fizzed out.

True to the Chief's predictions, Marin's armour was not EMP-proof.

Before the Chief could take advantage of his enemies' compromising position, an explosion sounded from somewhere ahead.

"Looks like your turret is gone," Cortana said cheerfully.

"It wasn't â€" " Marin grunted in pain. "It wasn't mine."

Chief shrugged, and drew out his pistol.

Marin flipped himself up, and action that the Chief would have thought beyond him. He slashed with terrifying speed, almost catching the Spartan unawares.

Almost.

Chief turned his body just in time to avoid the worst of the blow, although his shoulder was still caught by the sword. The sword merely sparked off, unable to penetrate the otherworldly armour in its currently un-energized state.

It suddenly occurred to the Chief why Marin powered up his sword so late in the fight â€" he was saving its power for when his shields dropped. Not that it mattered, since it was now unable to do anything of the sort.

Chief grabbed hold of Marin's sword arm, which was still outstretched. He squeezed and twisted at the same time, armour plates buckling.

Marin grunted, a sound more of annoyance than pain, but he still dropped his weapon once holding it became no longer possible or feasible.

The Chief dragged Marin in before punching him in the face once more, and the kicked him away.

Marin stumbled, clearly dazed. He reached to his side, where his pistol was still holstered.

Chief raised his magnum and fired three times. Due to the precision nature of the weapon, he was able to ensure the bullets did not ricochet off the sloping armour plates of his target.

The force of the shots caused Marin to drop to one knee, the action of grabbing his pistol forgotten.

Marin looked up into the barrel of the Chief's weapon.

He laughed. It was a slow, rumbling sound â€" he was possibly suffering from internal bleeding. "This took long enough, didn't it?"

The Chief fired four times, putting his bullets through the heart of Marin. He could have gone for headshots, but he reasoned heart-shots would be kinder to his foe.

"Heartshots?" Cortana said, exasperated. "Really, headshots would

have been way cooler."

The Chief sighed.

* * *

><p>The allied army managed to fully break the Stanwick's fleet roughly half an hour after the turret takedown. Troops had landed long before that, though. There were fewer of them than would have been optimal, but considering everything stacked against themâ€|<p>

The Chief had to concede an impressive number landed.

Blue team had linked up with large, primarily Noxian force that was advancing up the center of the city. Despite repeated attempts by the Chief, he was still unable to raise Kolminye or any of the other war leaders. More likely than not, the jamming device was located in Stanwick's base of operations.

Chief had given Cortana the task of trying to locate the source of the jamming. She seemed set on the task, although it was taking her longer than past attempts. Considering her current state, that was less than surprising.

None of the city-states composing the allied army knew what was going on in Zaun. No messages had been received from them, and no birds sent were returned. And, of course, there was the jamming field.

Needless to say, no one knew what to expect inside the city. When they finally breached the defenses around the city and entered it, they found nothing of note. Literally nothing of note; there was no one except automatons. They had arranged everything into defensible points, kill-zones, bunkers, and turret emplacements. There was no sign of civilians, or Zaunite forces, orâ€| anything alive.

That seemed to unnerve the allied army, but the Chief could only think of what that implied. It was highly doubtful that they had all been killed, but he kept that as an open possibility. The only other option was that they had all been subdued and imprisoned, but even that made little sense. Could Stanwick overpower all of Zaun?

The thought only highlighted how little the Chief knew of his enemy, despite being on the precipice of victory. He really disliked a lack of intel.

Another flurry of shots rained down from above, cutting down two Noxians too slow to react.

The Chief was already aiming his rifle, snapping it up and using two controlled bursts to take down the rangers.

More bolts streaked out from an alleyway, cutting down more soldiers. A few moments later a bunch of mechs stormed out, running into the thick of battle.

At the same moment, the Chief's motion sensor detected a host of dots moving in from the front. Riven, who was just ahead of him, noticed this too. She began to bark out orders to the Noxians, trying to

arrange them into a proper formation.

The Chief moved to the front, and stood firm as the automatons charged. He fired his assault rifle on full automatic, but only managed to cut down two of the mechs.

He had to admit; the new honour guard types were tough.

Luckily, that was why he had grabbed an extra weapon. After the turret's destruction, he had backtracked to the beach to secure some ammo from the wreckage of his transport. He had also ended up picking up a shotgun, since it seemed better suited for taking down the harder-armoured mechs.

And so, as they drew close, the Chief holstered his empty rifle and drew out the shotgun. He pumped it once, hearing the clicking noise of a shell slide home.

An honour guard drew dangerously close, its spear held out to skewer some helpless target.

The Chief wasn't a helpless target. He pulled the trigger, hearing the satisfying booming noise of the shotgun. The honour guard was felled immediately, a gaping crater in its chest.

Another ran up to the Spartan, spear raised high.

The Chief pivoted and pumped the shotgun simultaneously. As soon as he had the mech in his sights he fired, knocking the creature down to the ground.

He pumped again, and fired at the automaton behind the now-dead one. It fell, too, unable to stand the shotgun's damage.

Another pump of the weapon, and another empty casing went flying. The Chief turned, finding an honour guard that was in the midst of ripping apart two spearmen.

The Chief fired, but the mech seemed to have heard the shot and moved just in time. The shell still hit the creature in the arm and, while it didn't kill it outright, it ripped off its forearm.

It stumbled towards Chief, but didn't get more than two meters before a final shell put it down.

Around him dozens of soldiers were engaged in brutal combat. The honour-guard mechs had the upper hand, but their assault faltered anywhere a blue team member was located.

The Chief used his brief moment of peace to reload his weapon, one individual shell at a time. He had enough ammunition for a protracted fight, but he'd rather save it for only the larger mechs. There were plenty of those around, though rangers seemed to be pouring in from side streets and the like.

He moved forwards and fired, taking down an honour guard in the midst of a savage downstroke. The soldier he saved quickly crawled back and was hauled to his feet by his companions, although they didn't seem too happy about it.

Another pumping action, and another shot into metal skin. Another dead mech.

And then another, dropped just as it was about to let loose a powerful beam of energy.

One ranger came in close to the Chief with its melee attachment, but the Chief merely elbowed it in the face. The force of the hit alone cracked metal and dropped it down, where it was finished by a boot to the chest area.

A beam of energy slashed across his shields, draining them almost all the way down. The shot was incredibly powerful, and the Chief made sure to remember that.

He turned to the firer, who was standing out of the effective range of his shotgun. He yanked his magnum out and fired it at the machine, using half a clip to pierce its head.

Chief holstered his magnum and his shotgun, opting to switch back to his assault rifle. He reloaded it with swift motions, allowing the empty magazine to drop to the ground. He fired at once, ripping through another honour guard.

More contacts on his motion sensor indicated enemies. At almost the same moment, Yasuo began to shout something about heavy weapons.

True enough, a few teams of heavy weapon rangers moved into position on the gantries above the allies. They were setting up mortar-like weapons that hissed as if under intense pressure.

Chief aimed up at them, but decided against shooting. He would need more than one magazine to take them down conventionally, and they would shoot before then.

He switched aim to the supports holding the gantry up, and fired in quick bursts to ensure as many bullets hit as possible.

The metal structure groaned. While it appeared sturdy, it was weaker than Chief had initially thought. Clearly the denizens of Zaun did not have a high opinion of personal safety.

As soon as the struts bent, the entire gantry began to twist. The mechs atop of it could not keep steady, and so began to slide down the tilted end. The entire structure hit the ground moments later, crushing flat a handful of mechs who could not clear the area in time.

The Chief glanced down at his ammo counter, and decided not to reload just yet. He only had a handful of bullets, but saving them made sense " he wasn't sure when he'd be able to get more ammunition.

Chief felt something claw at his leg, and looked down to see a half-destroyed honour guard latched onto him. He kicked it away and curbed stomped its head.

Another nearby honour guard took notice of him, and it held firmly onto its spear as it tried to fire.

Chief fired the remaining bullets into the mech. While the bullets did not cause critical damage, it succeeded in knocking the mechs aim off, enough that it fired uselessly into the air.

The honour guard made an electronic gurgling sound and threw its spear to the ground. it charged at the Chief, its heavy tread making small cracks in the grey stonework.

The Chief held his rifle in his left hand while bringing back his right hand. As the mech approached, he curled his armoured fingers into a fist.

The creature tried to tackle him down, but at the same moment the Chief sent his fist crashing forwards. His first hit broke armour plating, yet he could not punch all the way through.

Nonetheless, the force of his hit forced the mech back. He attacked it again, this time crunching right through its thick chest armour. He grabbed something inside " he couldn't be quite sure what it was, exactly " and he squeezed. The whatever-it-was shattered, and the machines' lights all flared out.

The Chief tossed the dead frame away and reloaded his rifle with extreme calm. The battle around him seemed to be dying down, the mechs having decided to regroup further down the road.

"Chief?"

Cortana's voice was like a godsend.

"I'm getting some powerful readings, Chief. I think the mock Halo is building up some serious power."

The Chief was silent for a full minute. "Can you detect its location?"

"That's the thing," Cortana said. "It is everywhere, like it is diffused into everything in the city."

"|Could it have been hooked up to electrical wires?" the Chief wondered.

"I doubt they have electric wires," Cortana told him. "But| they do have steam pumping systems that stretch the length of the city. At least, that's what I think they are. They could sewage pipes, I guess."

"Can you find a single point where all the pipes meet?"

"I do not have charts of the city underground, Chief," Cortana said, sounding exasperated. "I did, however, triangulate the rough source of the jamming signal. When I combined that with the wide-spread charge-up, I got a fairly accurate target area. I think."

"What's the problem?" Chief always knew there was a problem. Always, without a doubt, something would go wrong or otherwise not match the overall plan.

"It's several hundred meters underground."

"Uh... what?" the Chief blinked. "It's a bunker?"

"I dunno. It's just underground."

The Chief looked around. He was the bodies of Noxian soldiers, many of which were dismembered or burned black from plasma fires. He could also see the bodies of automatons, albeit in far fewer numbers. They were just as mangled as the humans.

He continued looking, until his eyes passed over a large rectangular grate set into the ground. It was easily large enough to fit several people in at the same time.

"Would we be able to reach it through the sewers?" Chief wondered aloud.

"Maybe. I mean, there has to be a way to reach the steam pumps." Cortana did not sound too sure of herself.

"There could be a pumping station," Chief replied haltingly. He wasn't too sure how the cities here worked. He had only really seen Piltover in depth - everything else had been in various stages of battle.

"I _could_ get a better signal the deeper we go. Probably."

"All right then," Chief decided. He moved to the grate, and at the same time called out for his team.

He did not shout, nor use the team communication channel - that was still jammed, of course. His team heard him regardless of that, and immediately moved to him.

"What's up?" Yasuo asked. He seemed to be panting, although the Chief - once again - could not tell anything because of his mask. That almost made him smile, as he almost never took off his own helmet. Were other people unnerved from that?

"There is a possibility our enemy is in some form of underground bunker, in the..."

"Grid 6 cross 8 region," Cortana finished for him in a bubbly voice.

"I have absolutely no idea where that is," Thresh said, which was rather unusual for him. Normally, he said nothing at all.

"That's fine," Chief told him. "Since you guys won't be going in." He thought for a moment. "Yet."

"Uh... What?" Graves sounded perplexed. He even took his cigar out of his mouth, which only helped to emphasize how confused he was.

"Chief, this is just like before," Riven pointed out. "We're in this together, you know?"

Chief nodded. "Of course. That is why I need you all to do something

else."

"Somethingâ€¦ other than finishing this?" Yasuo inquired, sounding almost sad.

The sound of heavy gunfire started to sound again. White contrails signaling rockets dominated the skies, and flashed of bright, ethereal light rose up to meet them.

"If we all go down, then everyone else will have no idea what is going on," Chief reasoned to them. "We need to alert the war leaders of where they need to go to end this. Otherwise, should we fail, there can be no recovery."

Chief shrugged before adding, "And they have a lot of soldiers at their command."

"Tha' sure as hell doesn' mean you have to go down alone," Graves drawled out. If the Chief had not already been used to Graves method of speech, he would have had a hard time understanding him.

"Graves, I need you to go to Caitlyn and her Piltoverian forces. They would probably still be on the beach now. If you tell them, I'm sure they will be the first to follow after me."

"P-Piltover?" Graves sputtered out. "I'm still wanted there, you know?"

Chief ignored him, instead turning to Yasuo. "You need to go to the Ionian forces and tell Karma the same thing. She should be able to find a moreâ€¦ elegant entrance than this one." Chief waved his hand to the direction of the bright. "They are probably where the magic is happening."

"Yes," Yasuo sighed. "Because I have such a _great _relationship with Ionians."

Chief was already facing Thresh when Yas voiced his complaint, so he therefore payed no heed to it. "Thresh, you'll be heading towards the left. The Demacian forces should be there, along with High Councilor Kolminye. The High Councilor should trust what you say, and they have the most forces of everyone here."

The Chief was going to turn to Riven and tell her what she was to do, but she already seemed to be on the ball.

"I guess I'm going to see the Noxian High Command once again, huh?" She shook her head. "I can't say I like the sound of that, butâ€¦"

She sighed.

"Thank you, everyone," Chief said sincerely. He began to pry the metal grate loose, almost ripping it off with one small tug. "I â€"

"We'll see ya later, Chief," Graves said roughly. He pressed his shotgun firmly to his shoulder and began to walk away, tossing his cigar to the ground.

Everyone else nodded and set off as well, although they did so rather slowly.

And, as the sounds of battle began to reach a new crescendo, the Master Chief descended into the bowels of the city.

* * *

><p>Somewhere, Zaun

He ripped himself free from the constrictive plates around him. Everything on him _hurt _like utter hell, and the obstructive, constrictive annoying as hell armour wasn't helping in the least.

His arm wouldn't come free of the plating, and he had to pull so hard that he was pretty sure he had dislocated his elbow.

But he was free soon enough, and it felt great.

He wanted to sit, cry, and scream all at the same time. But firstâ€¦|

He needed to deal with the damn _needles. _They were sticking into his chest, three evenly spaced on each side. He tore them out with sudden ferocity, feeling the brief moment of pain as they separated.

Blood welled up from the wounds, harsh red against his black bodysuit. He was used to worse wounds, so that didn't bother him. The things in his hands did, though.

He roughly threw the needles away and roared in anger.

He sat there for a few seconds â€" or maybe it was minutes. Or hell, even hours. Eventually, he thought to grab one of the needles again.

It was small, and it was empty. Words were printed along the side, along with several oddly spaced black lines. He could not make sense of said black lines, but he could read the words.

Not that the term 'biofoam' made any sense to him, but he could honestly care less at this moment in time.

Only one reoccurring thought came to him in those moments.

As he stood up and looked at the raging battle in Zaun, he realized that he might have finally found someone worthy to fight.

* * *

><p>Still a few chapters to go, but... close enough to the end.

If anyone still cares, drop a review if that gives you a kick. If you don't, try not to get kicked. That could be bad for your health.

Have an awesome day!

48. Chapter 48

Chapter 48: There'll be another time.

The Final Battle, p2

High Councilor Kolminye drew back her fist and unleashed another blast of magical lightning straight into the exposed chest of a zealot-pattern mech.

The automaton twitched violently as magical electricity coursed through its systems, frying it from the inside. The lightning was not content to merely sit in one host, and it began to chain outwards to other mechs.

Two more automatons collapsed as their internal workings were fried.

Two random bolts of plasma hit Kolminye's shoulder, burning through her robes as singeing her skin.

She hissed at the unexpected pain, but recovered quickly enough to bring up a magic barrier. More shots followed the first two, but they were absorbed or deflected by hastily erected shield/

Trusting her magic to keep her safe from bullets, Kolminye focused on thinning out the mech horde some more.

That was their top-priority at the moment: clearing a path to the pump sub-station. She had, along with Jarvan IV, been alerted by Thresh of the Chief's plan of attack. Jarvan, despite his reservations of the specter, trusted the Spartan enough to follow his orders.

Kolminye, too, trusted the Spartan. While she still wasn't sure about how she felt about him " he was a hyper-lethal super-soldier from another dimension " he hadn't led them astray so far, despite the near impossible task set for them. So she had agreed with the Chain Warden and the Demacian prince.

As High Councilor, she did have access to city records that normal people would not, and so she was able to roughly pinpoint the best access area to meet up with the Spartan.

Of course, the mechs knew where the best access point was, too. Their forces were more concentrated in the areas leading up to the sub-station, and there was no way the allies could bypass them. They couldn't leave any automatons alive, after all. The point here was to finish the fight.

And so, the allied force found themselves slogging through a battlefield of enemies. There were enough mechs that Kolminye was already beginning to her magic reserves draining.

She tried to push that thought away even as she cast another ignite spell. Her target zealot caught on fire, its very armour sloughing off its metal frame. Within seconds it was just a pile of liquid metal.

Her magic shield took a sudden hit from a beam of pure plasma, shattering it like a plane of glass. Kolminye spun around even as a second beam slammed into her, melting her skin and searing her flesh.

She yelled out in pain, bringing one hand to her wound. She thrust the other one out towards her first assailant, and let loose.

A blast of pure energy slammed into the honour guard pattern automaton, throwing it backwards several meters.

The second creature ran in, trying to finish her off in close combat. Kolminye did not give it that chance; as it drew close, she cast an exhaustion spell upon it.

The mech moved as if under water, and when it tried to attack her, it swung laughably slowly.

A simple lightning spell was enough to drop that mech, its severely drained frame unable to handle the coursing electricity.

Still gasping in pain, the High Councilor brought both her hands together and whispered words. She thrust both her hands skywards before bringing them back down again to chest level. A green glow suffused Kolminye, and her body healed itself at a stunning rate. Unfortunately, not even an up-powered healing spell could restore her back to full health; she would still need to get proper medical attention later to take care of her burns.

She couldn't afford to rest, no matter how much she felt like doing so. The enemy was still pushing hard, and they needed to break through. They couldn't just leave the Master Chief to finish everything alone, could they?

Another automaton tried to charge at Kolminye, but this one was only a ranger-pattern. A quick flick of her hands sent a fireball rolling into it, blasting it back with the same force as a shotgun.

More mechs noticed her, though, and these ones were of the honour guard variety. They were far too much to handle in a straight up fight. So, as they charged towards her, Kolminye disappeared in a puff of yellow light.

She reappeared behind the mechs, completely unnoticed. The honour guards stopped and looked around in confusion.

Kolminye gestured with both of her hands, and twin streams of ice were summoned into existence. The streams combined and blasted the honour guard mechs, hitting their undefended backs. It didn't kill them outright, but ice began to coat them as they struggled to move.

After two more seconds of continuous ice, Kolminye stopped and summoned a fireball. She tossed it at the iced-over machines, and watched as they were consumed in fire.

With the mechs dead, the High Councilor took a deep breath. The battle was still raging, so she once again contributed to the fighting with bolts of magical energy.

A golden figure slammed down beside her, shocking her with its suddenness.

"This is fun!" Prince Jarvan shouted out as he rose to his full height.

"That very much depends on your definition of 'fun'," Kolminye said dryly.

Jarvan smiled, revealing a set of pearly-white teeth. He tossed his standard up in the air, and Kolminye watched as it landed dead-center on a ranger's head.

"Did your outflanking forces break through yet?" Kolminye asked the Demacian.

"No, not yet," he replied with a shake of his head. "They dug in well."

"We don't have that much time, you know," the High Councilor insisted.

"Mhm."

Jarvan suddenly pivoted and drove his javelin through the chest of an attacking honour guard, gutting it right through.

He wrenched the weapon out, spun it, and then brought it back into a guard position.

"We can make a push right now. The sub-station is just ahead," Jarvan said, sounding serious.

Kolminye nodded.

"ENEMY REINFORCEMENTS!"

The shout came from some random Demacian soldier somewhere up ahead. For a second, neither Kolminye nor Jarvan could see what the problem was.

And then they saw the literal horde of honour guard pattern mechs running down the main street, and they knew they had a major problem on their hands.

* * *

><p>The Noxians tore through the enemy like a hurricane, but this was nothing new for Darius. He had always had his troops fight to their highest standards, and anyone that didn't was immediately executed. That way, only the finest populated his ranks.<p>

But here, in Zaun, it hardly seemed to matter. No matter how many ranks they shattered, no matter how many positions they overran, no matter how many mechs littered the ground like a demented carpet, they could not get any closer to their intended goal.

They were trying to breach the massive sewer-outlets that were set into the far side of the bay, but the enemy was endless and too well

set up for the Noxians to get their quickly. And the one thing they did not have was time.

Riven had been the one to bring up the plan with Swain, his lord and master. Swain didn't trust the Exile " why would he? She had abandoned Noxus, after all.

But while she had been the one to mention the plan, it was something the Master Chief had thought up, and that was more than enough to get Swain to agree.

That and the fact that this was an end-of-the-world scenario.

Darius had to admit, though, Riven showed strength as she fought. It was impressive, and worthy of any Noxian " Ex or otherwise. Not that he approved of her, but he acknowledged power when he saw it.

He stopped his reminiscence as soon as an enemy came within range of him. He decapitated it with a single strike.

As he gazed at the headless corpse, he felt nothing but contempt.

More enemies rushed at him. Perhaps they thought to overpower him with number" not that it would succeed.

He spun his axe around, catching three rangers with the outstretched axe-head.

Three rangers fell dead.

Two more rushed in close, ready to stab with their sword-arms.

Darius struck the first one with a crippling blow, splitting it into two pieces. The second was brutally punched, its chest crushed from the force of the blow.

The last three rangers stopped as they watched their companions fall. As one, they turned and ran.

"Not so fast," Darius said gruffly. With a flick of his hand his axe flashed out, catching his fleeing foes with the back-hook. They were ruthlessly dragged back to the Noxian general, where they were then quickly dispatched.

Darius looked to his axe. It was odd not to see any form of blood on the weapon. He had come to associate blood spill with battlefield success.

It was a morbid thought, even for one such as him.

He moved forwards without delay, his tread taking him through the raging battle.

He dispatched automatons as they came at him, sighing at the ease with which they fell. He also gave orders out to the Noxian ranks, trying to tidy up their attacks and get the attack force moving faster.

Riven flashed into his field of view, fighting off three honour guard mechs at the same time. She moved with skill, dodging strikes and punishing each mech for every misstep or failed strike.

Darius moved towards her. A ranger got in his way, so he kicked it down and slammed his axe-pole into it.

Riven killed one of the honour guard by stabbing it through the face. When the second one tried to stab her in the back, she stunned it with a perfectly-timed magic burst, and back flipped away from the last mech.

The mech that had been stunned recovered quickly, raising its spear up. It was suddenly pulled off balance and fell to the ground.

When it looked up, all it saw was the descending axe.

It took a hard tug to free his axe from the confines of the mechs chest. While a lesser man might have needed to check the mech for death, Darius knew his every blow was a death sentence.

Riven danced around the last honour guard, but the mech was not so easily baited. It waited for Riven to trip up, waited for the right moment to strike.

The moment came when Riven stumbled over a piece of loose scrap metal. The honour guard lashed out with unexpected speed, aiming for Riven's heart.

The Exile flipped right over the spear, slashing as she came down. She made a large rent in its carapace, and heard the electronic whine of pain from the creature.

She ducked under its response strike, and slashed horizontally with her sword.

With a final screech, the honour guard fell to the ground, dead.

Riven turned to Darius, trying to blow her sweaty hair out her eyes.

He tilted his head to indicate her respect. While he acknowledged strength, he did not praise it. Would not praise it.

"We aren't any closer," Riven admitted, looking Darius firmly in the eye.

Normally, he would take such a thing as a challenge. But not here, and not now.

He nodded, signifying that he knew that already.

Riven shook her head and looked around. "There has to be a way to cut through them," she insisted. "They can't be endless."

There was an explosion, and a massive plume of dust flew into the air many meters away from the pair. As the smoke cleared, a large stalker tank was revealed. It immediately began to lay waste to the Noxian

army, its heavy cannon tearing through flesh and armour with ease.

Riven was already moving to engage the new threat, but not Darius. He turned to the left after feeling minute vibrations beneath his feet.

Another column of sand erupted from the earth, clouding the air and making it much harder to see things. However, the stalker-tank that rose from the freshly created hole was easy to see.

Darius hefted his axe and moved towards the multi-legged vehicle with deadly purpose, hoping to strike it down before it could cause any significant damage.'

That's when a third geyser erupted from further behind Darius. He looked back to see yet another stalker rising from the ground, its main weapon spinning ferociously.

Darius watched that stalker for several long moments, before turning his attention to the other parts of his army. Bursts of sand were appearing everywhere, heralding the arrival of a heavily mechanized foe.

* * *

><p>Graves' shotgun made heavy booming noises as it punched craters into ranger carapaces. Each one was individually weak, but there were a lot of them.<p>

Graves chuckled around the cigar in his mouth. It was funny how he used to think that the mechs were a tough foe. Now the basic ones just seemed like minions, with the larger ones being the only real threats.

The shotgunner swept his weapon across the battlefield, searching for more enemies to destroy. He spotted one potential group, but there were suddenly engulfed in a wild green ring of energy before being erased from existence.

A small dark skinned child ran from the epicenter of the blast and dove into another group of mechs, swinging wildly with an energized bat.

Graves chuckled once more and let the kid have his fun. He moved around, deciding that it would be best to join back up with the robed Ionian soldiers.

The Piltover forces â€" well, mostly Caitlyn â€" had been surprisingly receptive the plan he had laid out. Of course, they had eyed him warily the whole timeâ€" but that was an improvement over arresting him on the spot.

They had realized that they did not have the forces for any kind of attack, though. That was why they had decided to stay as a rearguard while everyone else cleared out the city. they also realized that they could not sit back while they were in the endgame.

They had decided grouping up with the Ionian forces, which were closest, would be the best course of action.

The Ionians had been more than a little reluctant to go along with the plan. It seemed that Yasuo hadn't had as much luck as Graves had when it came to negotiations.

In the end, both sides had agreed that joining together would be efficient. And, surprisingly, it was. They had managed to push fairly far in in a rather short amount of time. Their main goal: enter the mining pits near the rocky mesa south of the city. in fact, they were close enough that they would be able to enter in under a half hour.

That thought made Graves smile. He was eager to finish this battle and get back to the good old rift. He wasn't about the whole mercenary life " he enjoyed skirmishes, sure, but all out battles? He preferred to keep things simple.

Being an outlaw was simple. And fun.

With a click and a boom Graves sent out a lethal wave of bullets, each one enough to put a crater in an oncoming ranger.

That got their attention, Graves noted with some satisfaction as a dozen mechanical heads turned towards him.

He pumped his weapon and fired, never pausing except to reload when his cartridge ran dry.

And again, as soon as that group of mechs fell dead, he switched to the next group of targets. Each one he killed brought him closer to ultimate victory " well, that was how he felt about it, anyways.

Bolts of lightning fell from the sky very near to Graves' position, making him flinch with the sudden blinding light. The Ionian mages made sure to use their incredible skill to thin out the largest groups of automatons, and they did so with remarkable precision.

Graves still didn't like anything that came from the sky, no matter how reliable it was.

Beams of plasma energy lanced across the battlefield from the buildings above, indiscriminately cutting down Ionians and Piltoverians. Graves knew he could do nothing about the jackal-pattern mechs, for the simple reason that his shotgun could not reach that far.

The firing arcs offered by the buildings were very limited, though, so the farther they pushed the easier it was to avoid enemy fire.

A zealot came up behind Graves, turning its entire upper body to get a more powerful hit.

Graves turned and fired straight up, through the head of the zealot.

The zealots head exploded, showering the area with little metal splinters. Graves was already turning, seeking out another target.

Another bolt of lightning descended from the sky, slamming into a spiky-looking building where a squad of jackals was held up. The bolt ripped through the unprotected building, shredding the brick and stone as if it was naught but paper.

There was a long pause before the entire building detonated. It lit up the surrounding area with a harsh blue light, and electricity sparked through the air. Automatons that had been protecting the building were thrown away by the force of the blast, and nearby Ionians were aslo knocked flat.

Graves grimaced as he saw the carnage. He doubted the Ionian mages would have planned something so potentially dangerous. The lightning strike probably hit some munitions or a generator of some sort, and started a chain reaction.

And this was why he trusted nothing from the skies.

The outlaw started running forwards, trying to find a better (less explosive prone) position to hide behind. While there was plenty of cover, there was little tactically beneficial cover.

Graves almost surprised himself with that kind of thinking. Apparently the Chief had been rubbing off on him.

There was a sudden gust of powerful wind that knocked aside nearly a dozen grouped rangers. Yasuo dashed forth right after, slashing through the entire group in seconds.

"Stop taking kills," Graves yelled out at him.

Yasuo touched down right beside the outlaw. He placed both his hands on his hips and announced proudly, "That's what I'm good at!"

There was a pause.

"â€|wait, that's not what I meant," Yasuo said belatedly.

Graves shook his head. "How close r' we to getting' through?"

"Uh... close enough?"

"Thanks for being so specific," the shotgunner told his friend as he fired at more rangers.

Yasuo waved his sword and summoned a wall of wind, using it to deflect jackal fire. Graves just continued to pump shot after shot into automatons, clearing the way for soldiers.

Graves felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned to Yasuo, who was pointing his finger at a group of oncoming zealots.

Graves shrugged and brought his shotgun firmly to his shoulder. He had to wait for the zealots to get within range, but at the rate they were moving it wouldn't take too long.

Three paces away. Two paces away. One pace away.

Graves let loose with a withering buckshot, terminally wounding one

zealot and crippling another. He used single shots after, placing each one with precision.

Yasuo gripped his sword tightly and moved forwards to intercept the large automatons. The first of the surviving zealots made a lunge, its long sword outstretched as if to impale the Ronin.

Yasuo turned his body aside and made a lunge of his own, cutting his sword through the soft tubing that was the creatures neck.

The zealot simply collapsed as the wanderer removed his weapon. It seemed as if the mech just lost the will to live. Of course, that was not the case " Yasuo's deadly energized sword had severed all electrical connections between the mechanical heart and its processor, and then cauterized the wound. Nothing short of a full repair would get that mech moving again.

But Yasuo was not focused on that. He was moving to the next one, bringing his sword around in an arc in order to intercept another red blade.

Sparks flew as the two swords hit one another. Not even a moment passed before Yasuo disengaged, thrusting out with his sword.

The automaton parried the hit, punching out with its free hand at the same moment.

Yasuo whirled around and brought his sword crashing down, slicing both hands off the zealot. Then, with a twist of his sword, he impaled the creature through the heart.

While the Ronin was still removing his sword another zealot rose up behind him.

A single explosive canister from Graves blew it away, returning it back to its component pieces.

He pumped his weapon again, and focused fire on another zealot. Yasuo once again dived into combat, completely ignoring that Graves was firing in.

The fight lasted for mere moments before a red laser of energy tore through the zealots, neatly bisecting bodies. Those wounds detonated a second after, causing fatal injuries in automatons not killed outright.

Yasuo paused, his sword still upraised for a death-dealing strike. "Heh?"

He slowly sheathed his sword. "Talk about kill stealing!"

"You were taking too long," Viktor said in his classically metallic voice. His shoulder mounted death laser was hissing steam, signifying that it was still cooling down from its last action.

Graves looked at the mechanical man questioningly. He knew there was more to his surprise visit than simply speeding things up.

"We got through," Viktor told them. "The forces here are pushing the slowest."

Graves shrugged. So he _was _just here to speed things up.

"Come now," the mechanical man said. He started to stride forth with quick steps, entirely ignoring the battle around him.

Graves shrugged for a second time and followed him, using his shotgun to gun down nearby enemies.

Yasuo stood there, as if dumbstruck. He only hurried to catch up once the gap between them widened.

Viktor shot out another laser, annihilating a mech squad trying to set up a heavy weapon. he let out a beam of red energy at another foe, disintegrating the flame-thrower mech with shocking ease.

Yasuo continuously dashed from enemy to enemy, focusing more on killing than following.

Ionian soldiers advanced as well, their confidence boosted by the Champions. Not that their advance was ever on doubt; they would have gotten through regardless.

It was still reassuring for Graves to see them winning. Every step was a step closer to victory.

Every time a group of mechs went in for a counter-attack, Viktor would simply cast a spell and destroy them all. Even when a squad of honour-guard mechs appeared, a simply chaos storm drained them of all their power, leaving them as lifeless husks.

At that point, the automatons just began to flee. They scattered into alleyways and buildings, giving way before the army in front of them.

All this only made Graves wonder why Viktor hadn't participated in the fighting much, much earlier. He would have made everything far easier.

They passed by stone buildings, but the area was becoming more barren the further they went. Enemy contacts had dwindled to the point of nonexistence, while friendly contacts increased. By the time they reached the mining pits, the majority of the combined Ionian and Piltover forcers were already there.

"Ah, yes," Viktor said. "And here is the problem."

"Problem?" Graves moved as close to the edge of the pit as he dared.

"The mechanical army set of explosives in the mid-tiers of the pit, causing a landslide which has covered up the entrance," Viktor announced, as if this was a game show and only he had the answer to.

"And ya couldn't tell us this earlier?" Graves demanded. "At least then we coulda gone another way."

"Impossible," Viktor stated. "It would take us approximately 1.2 hours to make it to the nearest underground entry point, assuming

enemy resistance stays consistent. By that time " "

"Yeah, I got it," Graves said with a sigh. "Hell, what're' we gunna do now?"

"Dig?" Yasuo said halfheartedly.

Viktor straightened suddenly. "We have multiple enemy contacts from the rear."

Graves swore and spun around. Already he could see flashes of light, signifying heavier weapons being fired.

"I should have brought a shovel," Yasuo said sadly, staring at the dirt-packed pit.

* * *

><p>Talon ducked beneath a horizontal swipe and delivered a sharp jab with his arm dagger, the blade sharp enough to puncture through with one strike. Just to be safe, though, he followed up with three more jabs - he wanted to ensure that the target was eliminated.<p>

An honour guard came up from the left. Talon immediately observed its weak points and possible vital locations. Taking down a larger mech in a short period of time was harder for an assassin like him.

Turns out he did not need to. Two curved blades punctured right through the automaton, instantly felling it like a tree.

"Where is your friend?" Irelia asked as she came up beside the Noxian. Her last two blades flashed out and cut down another two rangers. All the blades returned to her and reformed into her iconic blade.

"She's... Here," Talon said vaguely. Everyone seemed to be expecting him to keep tabs of Katarina, the assassin he worked with the most. He didn't even bother keeping track of her anymore; and she did not even want to be found anyways.

Irelia gave him a look. Talon merely shrugged and pulled his hood down.

He threw out a trio of shurikens with the sole intention of thinning out the rangers trying to crowd in on them.

Gunfire erupted on his right, but he was already moving; ducking into the shadows reappearing behind his would-be killer. He punched his dagger through the automaton's head and then quickly slipped it back out. It would not do to get it stuck.

He grimaced at the dark fluid that covered the blade. It would stain more than blood.

Irelia was wading into their enemies with her blades arranged in an x-pattern. She cut and sliced with deadly efficiency, the magic coursing through her swords allowing for instant kills on each strike.

Talon looked behind him at the pile of rubble that was blocking their path. Trapped inside a courtyard with their only exit blocked and an army trying to kill them...

Well, that wasn't exactly his ideal situation.

He could only wonder what was taking Ziggs so long to set his bombs. He was supposed to be a hextech explosives expert; he should be quicker than this.

Not to mention it was his fault they were in this situation anyways. It was supposed to be a simple scouting mission, but of course the bombing idiot yordle had... Bombed it.

I could always be worse, though. Talon was used to worse.

Talon grabbed the arm of a ranger and shoved his dagger into the unprotected spot beneath its shoulder.

He stepped back to avoid a disemboweling strike and retaliated with a stab, but his dagger hit the armour the wrong way and it bounced off.

Stepping back, Talon threw out more shurikens to shred the far-too-close automaton.

Two more rangers closed the gap.

"Irelia," Talon hissed.

Upon seeing her companions plight the Ionian captain dashed over, turning the first mech into scrap and chopping the limbs off the second.

"Ziggs is taking far too long," she said.

Talon rolled his eyes.

A series of blue lights flashed through the windows of the leftmost courtyard structure, and a series of mechanical parts flew out of said windows.

"At least Ahri is making progress," Irelia stated as she commanded her sword into a guard position.

"She can escape if things get bad," Talon pointed out dryly. "We can't."

"She won't," Irelia said firmly. She gestured

with one hand and her sword spun around, cutting off the limbs of three rangers at once.

"But she could," Talon insisted. Another ranger came in for a stab, so he used its own momentum to flip it over and, once it was down, stab it in the face.

Irelia huffed and tilted her head away, as if tired of simply conversing with a Noxian.

That brought a smile to Talon's lips.

Another mech came by, and another mech fell to the floor in pieces. Still, there was a hell of a lot of them. Talon was at least thankful that they were of the weaker variety. Anything else would have seen him dead long ago.

There was a dull boom, and the ground shook beneath their feet. Talon's immediately thought that Ziggs had broken through, but when he looked back, the pile of rubble was still there.

Stone dust trickled down on the assassin as he turned to Ireliia, who was in the midst of disemboweling a zealot-pattern automaton. "What the hell was that?"

Ireliia pivoted away from the now-dead zealot and impaled a ranger through the throat. "I'm not sure," she admitted, her face a mask of concentration.

The noise repeated itself, and more dust trickled down. A few loose stones tumbled, too, crushing some helpless mechs beneath their weight.

A blue orb of power suddenly zipped past Talon and passed through three rangers that had been lined up. Each one started to spasm before falling to the ground, dead.

"Just what," Ahri said as she landed beside the Noxian, "the heck is going on underground?"

* * *

><p>Advisor Mira walked through the corridor fearfully, flinching at every distant explosion.<p>

The honour guard solders did not react like she did. Actually, they didn't react to anything. All they did was walk in perfect lockstep, surrounding her like a metal box.

They were there for her protection, she knew that. After all, she had been the one to submit final designs on their crystalline-steam matrix. She was important to the automaton project, and so risks could not be taken with her life.

But still, she hadn't expected things to come to this - to a full scale war.

No, that wasn't true either, she realized. She knew that something like this would happen, but the reality of it had never hit her. Or hit so close to home.

Well, it was too late for her to now be regretting her decisions.

The sound of metal feet hitting metal grating was starting to disturb Mira as much as the battle raging above.

She wondered why she was hearing so many detonations. The designs of the automatons could not be so flawed that they were losing â€| or were they? Stanwick had assured her that mechanical soldiers were

more effective than real onesâ€|.

There was another explosion, much closer than before but much smaller as well. Probably a focused charge, or maybe a magical blast.

She couldn't figure out what was causing the dull pounding, though. It wasâ€| kind of like the sound of a forge hammer. Like something was trying to brute force its way through something.

Mira blinked, and suddenly all hell broke loose.

The wall to her left â€" the solid sheet of metal a meter thick â€" was suddenly and forcibly ripped apart. Chunks of material flew outwards, as well as something else.

Astonishingly, her honour guard was not fast enough to react in time. Pieces of metal ripped into their tight formation, impaling several and severely wounding others. She would have been a casualty, too, except one mech was in the way of he and the blast.

She was saved â€" but only barely.

The honour guard in front of her was on its knees, clutching a metal rebar in its chest. In the next instant, there was a green figure. It placed a boxy handled gun to the mechs head, and fired.

At this range, the sound was deafening for her.

She fully expected the armoured giant to hurt her, but it instead it crouched down to her level.

"Hello!" A cheerful female voice greeted her, surprising her to the point of scaring her. The figure did not look female at all. "Do you mind telling us where sector A is?"

"â€|W-w-what?" Mira stuttered out.

The figure got closer to her, and she instinctively backed up.

"Sorry," the voice apologized. "My friend here is not known for his patience."

"W-Why do you want to go to the control room?" Mira asked hesitantly.

"Ah, so that's what it is!" the voice exclaimed happily. "I knew it!"

"Please," the giant said in a baritone voice, "we need to know where Stanwick is. This had to end."

"We were only trying to help â€" " she stopped talking when she heard his armour shift. "The primary sector is that way." She pointed the way she came. "F-F-Follow the blue runes."

After a tense pause the giant stood up. There was a metallic click as a box slid out of his gun, and another click as he slipped a new one in its place.

"You won't hurt me?" she asked.

"Just don't get in the way, okay?" the bubbly female voice told her.

As the giant strode off, Mira couldn't tell the difference between its tread and that of the honour guards.

* * *

><p>The Master Chief walked down the corridor. His mini-map and motion sensor constantly gave him updates as to the layout of the area, but it was difficult. The entire base was oddly constructed, and it made it hard to traverse anything.<p>

"The lady was nice," Cortana said.

Chief didn't think it necessary to respond. He spotted another blue run set into a wall, and went in the direction it indicated.

Three honour guard mechs ran around a corner, heading straight at the Chief.

He snapped his rifle up, and used a focused burst to put down the closest one. He got a few shots off at the second one before they were too close.

He swung his rifle around like a club, hitting the honour guard with enough force to crush its head.

The third one slashed at his shields, draining them partially. It only got one chance to attack before Chief crushed its head too.

Chief reloaded his assault rifle and resumed walking.

"Soâ€¦ I guess we can conclude they know we are here," Cortana said almost too cheerfully.

"It was probably the girl," Chief said, referring to the scientist they had just left behind.

"Yeah, that's the most likely explanation," she scoffed. "Not the fact that we destroyed a battalion of honour guards in the sewers, and then brutally forced our way into a secret secure facility."

Chief grunted.

Cortana sighed.

They passed into another room, except everything seemed to be going on below them. The floor had turned into a walkway across a deep chamber that was filled with bits of machinery and weird tubes.

And, of course, plenty of automatons. Each one of them looked up as the Chief looked down.

There was no doubt in the Chief's mind that he had been spotted. One the honour guards raised their staffs in unison; Chief was left

without any doubt.

He turned and immediately started running across the grated walkway. The mechs let loose with their staffs, shafts of hot plasma sinking into the metal walkway.

Even though the Chief was moving too fast for them to land their shots, they were succeeding in hampering his progress.

The grated metal path was starting to melt, and therefor collapse. The Chief found himself trying to outrun the collapsing floor as well as the plasma that could break his shields in no time.

At the end of the walkway was something like a control booth. The door was open, and a handful of rangers were standing there.

They fired at the Chief at the same moment he lunged towards them.

His shields took the full force of the shots, draining them down to half. He was amongst them before they could fire another volley, though, and once he was in close combat it was simple for him to eliminate them.

The last few metal plates of the walkway fell into the room below, sealing the Chief off from that side of the facility.

A ranger twitched by Chief's feet. He stepped on it with his armoured boot and continued onwards.

He passed into another corridor. Pipes lined the side right wall, steam hissing from miniscule gaps. On the left wall he could see a series of runes, in several different colours. The only one that interested him, personally,

The blue rune pointed behind the Chief, so he trekked down the opposite end of the corridor.

There was a sudden, blaring sound. It rose in volume and pitch periodically and it was as damn loud.

"There goes the alarm," Cortana told him.

"Yes," Chief agreed.

More mechs rounded the corner. All were of the ranger variety, but a single honour guard was in the center of the pack; probably a leader.

There was no cover to hid behind, so the Spartan presented his shoulder to the group and fired from the hip.

Bullets slashed across his shields, draining them to a quarter. Chief fired his assault rifle in turn, cutting down three rangers in his first burst.

More bullets hit him, and his shield burst apart in a flare of light. More return fire from the Chief saw another two rangers fell.

The honour guard pushed its way to the fore; ignoring the rangers it

had pushed aside. It slammed downwards with its pole arm.

The Chief didn't even have to dodge; the blow was so poorly aimed that it missed completely. He drew his left hand back into a fist, and slammed it into the chest of the honour guard mech. It felt something inside, but paused before crushing it.

Behind the honour guard mechs and its remaining rangers, he could see nearly a dozen more rangers and half of that number in honour guards.

The Chief dropped his rifle and used his other hand to help him lift the honour guard, which had begun flailing at that point. He had to ignore the rangers slashing at his armour and only focus on lifting the machine. It took some effort, but the Chief managed to toss the honour guard mech into the next group.

The mech exploded as its breached reactor gave out, and the detonation took out the entire other group.

"That's a major design flaw," Cortana noted as the Chief finished off the rest of the rangers.

He snapped up his assault rifle and slid in another magazine. Instead of keeping it out, though, he decided to switch to his shotgun. It would be more useful to him at the close corridors.

He walked calmly down the corridor of shattered parts, his shotgun casually held in his hands. The corridor led into another room, although it was far more normal than the last one. The entire room had long tables with random mech body parts laid out on them. Doors were spaces around the room at even intervals. It looked like a research room, or a room with prototypes.

It also looked to have been recently evacuated. Papers and notes were scattered about haphazardly, and it even looked like some had gone through a shredder.

"Is it a problem that scientists are escaping?" Cortana asked the Chief.

Chief just shrugged as he made his way to a blue-marked door.

It opened by itself, revealing three men in white lab coats. They immediately jumped back in panic, and one even fell to the ground.

Chief stepped past them. "You were saying something about escaping?"

"That's rude, Chief," the AI replied.

Chief could hear explosions from high above. His allies seemed to have gotten far closer to Stanwick's facility.

His steps echoed as he moved quickly down corridors and rooms. Everything was unified in design and style, and the Chief was sure that without the blue rune markings he would be having major trouble right now.

A door to the Chief's left opened, and a pair of honour guards walked out. well, it was more like charged out " not that it mattered for the Chief. he lined his shotgun up with the center mass of the first mech, and let loose with two quick shots.

The mechanical creature stumbled back, its chest a cratered mess, and collapsed.

The second swept out with its spear, aiming low. The Chief snapped out with his foot and cracked the spear in half before blasting the honour guard at close range.

"Chief, three o'clock!"

The Chief turned just as a beam of staff plasma hit him in the chest, breaking his recently-recharged shields. A second beam slammed into his side, cutting a deep line into his armour.

Chief grimaced and ran forwards, pumping his shotgun. He tried to ignore the blaring warning sounds in his helmet. Another beam raced out for him, but he turned his body away. Once he was close enough, he fired his shotgun.

The first shell hit the guard at an angle that allowed it to simply bounce, causing no damage. The second shot, however, hit the mech right in the head " an instant kill.

The second of the pair twirled its staff around and thrust it forward. It grazed the Chief's side to little effect, but the Chief's return fire shredded the creature.

"This sucks," Cortana said. "These wall hamper your motion sensor."

The Chief hummed in agreement. He started to feed shells into his shotgun, and pumped the weapon once he was done.

"We need to be more careful," he said. "They can out swarm and outmaneuver us."

Another door hissed somewhere behind the Chief. A squad of rangers emerged and immediately spun towards the duo.

The Chief had already started to move by the time the first shots raced down the hallway. His shields were still down from his most recent engagement, so he did not want to risk running at a full squad of automatons.

He dove into an open blue-marked doorway and pulled the door shut behind him. From beyond the door he could hear the metallic click of running ranger feet.

Chief turned away from the door. The rangers would be here any moment, so finding cover would be most beneficial.

"What the hell is up with this room?" Cortana whispered.

The room was fairly large, and tubes and tables were spaced at random locations. Each tube was filled with a shining substance, and floating in each one was some human body part.

It looked exactly like a mad scientist's laboratory " which, in fact, was what Stanwick was.

Ranger feet clacked right outside the door. A heavier tread could be heard also " two, I fact, marching in unison. It was heavy enough that it was easily identifiable as Hunter-pattern mechs.

Chief quickly flipped over a table and took cover behind it, his shotgun tightly gripped in his hands.

There was another explosion, distant but far closer than the others before it. At almost the same moment the alarms went off again, the loud sound echoing throughout the entire underground structure.

The sounds outside the door lessened before resuming again. The sound of running ranger feet could be heard moving away from the door. It seemed likely that part of the enemy had split off to deal with whatever was causing the alarms.

"I think that our allies broke through," Cortana said.

"Our friends," Chief reminded her. He waited for three heartbeats. The mechs didn't break down the door like expected them to, or even attempt to open it.

Perhaps they were waiting for orders before they moved on. The rangers had never shown any independent action like the honour"guards did, so he doubted they were capable of individual thought.

Chief took a step back from the table.

Something slammed into the door, creating a massive dent that deformed it.

Chief took off, fleeing the room before the hunters could break in. While he was sure he could defeat them, he lacked the weaponry to make the fight quick. Right now, time was of the essence.

He turned down a hallway filled with more of the strange tubes. And then another.

It seemed like this entire sector was the laboratory. That made it straightforward to navigate, at least.

He vaulted tables when he came to them, and weaved around thick crystal mountings.

There was another explosion, still distant but once again closer than before. The weird crystal-lights that illuminated the place began to flicker, creating weird shadows. Whatever his friends had done was interrupting the flow of power.

He wasn't sure if that would be a good thing or a bad thing.

There was a loud boom as the door somewhere behind was breached.

Chief rounded a final corridor and stepped onto another metal

walkway. The lights chose that moment to come back on, illuminating the truly massive room he was in – or rather, above.

Far below him were massive metal clamps and frames, evidence that vehicles of a massive scale had been kept here. There was an equally massive door set into the wall, but it was shut tight.

His motion sensor was also pinging with contacts, and true enough, dozens of honour guard automatons were below. Unlike before, none paid any heed to the Spartan. Each one was running to a different doorway, deploying to different sections of the underground base. Most likely it was to deal with the intrusions.

The Chief didn't squander the distraction provided for him. He ran across the exposed walkway unharmed, making it into the control booth at the far end.

There was an honour guard inside tapping away at a console, but it was downed by two shots from Chief's shotgun. While the noise may have alerted the mechs below, there was no way for them to hit him now.

There were three doors, each marked with an individual coloured rune. Once again he entered the blue marked one, passing through it into another hallway.

"All these halls are getting annoying," Cortana told him, and Chief hummed in agreement. To him, it felt like fighting aboard the Autumn all over again. Or any shipboard engagement, really.

His motion sensor pinged, and three rangers rounded the corridor ahead of him. He ran up to meet them, firing his shotgun once he was within optimal range. They were eliminated within three shots. As he stepped over their scrap work bodies he reloaded his shotgun, hearing the satisfying click with every inserted shell.

Another door was at the end of the corridor. He opened the door and walked down another hall that fed into a larger circular room.

Doors were set at even intervals, a coloured rune marking each one. guarding said doors was a full squad of honour guard and a handful of rangers. They were all organized into ranks and clearly had been prepared for the eventuality that the Chief would make it this far.

This meant that he was close to his final goal. There would be no point in assigning a permanent guard to a location for anything else.

The rangers opened fire first, trying to pin the Chief in place while the honour-guards' staffs charged up.

Chief's shields took the brunt of the impact, draining them down a quarter as he ran towards them. The gap was large, though, and it and there was plenty of time for the mechs to pour out plasma fire.

The sheer weight of it dropped his shields down to a quarter, but he couldn't start dodging just yet. He needed to wait for the larger ones to start shooting.

The first of their staffs spat out a lance of plasma, and the Chief threw himself to the left. Another shot sprung out towards him, and he rolled right.

"Chief, move back," Cortana commanded.

He did just that, avoiding two more questing beams. He started running to the right, avoiding more of the incoming beams and dodging most of the ranger bullets.

He reached down to his side and grabbed a fragmentation grenade, the last of that kind that he had. He had been reluctant to use it, since he couldn't get more any time soon, but now was the right time.

Chief clicked the button on top and tossed it into the group, letting it settle to the floor.

The mechs were far too busy firing their weapons to avoid the grenade, just as the Chief had intended. It detonated with explosive force, ripping apart the legs of the honourguard standing over it. Splinters of metal lodged into other automatons nearby, distracting them and severely throwing off their aim, but otherwise causing little damage.

But the Chief had planned for that, too. While their aim was off he dove in, avoiding the worst of the plasma fire.

He fired his shotgun, killing a ranger outright. He fired again, and the blast took out two rangers that were too close together.

A ranger blade slashed against this shield, taking the bar down an inch. Chief turned and punched the offending ranger in the face, flattening its head.

Another blade impacted, taking the bar down another inch. And then another blade, taking it down further.

The Chief spun and shot a ranger in the head, spraying scrap metal around. He spun again and grabbed a descending sword, ripping the arm straight off the automaton.

Another slash and the Chief's shields collapsed completely in a burst of static electricity. One mech fizzed out completely as the electricity shorted its systems out.

By that point, the honour guards were wading into combat. As the Chief dodged a ranger an honour guard stabbed down, cutting the Chief on his shoulder.

Another spear stabbed for him, and he moved his entire upper body to dodge it.

And yet another pole arm descended for him while he was turning, so he had to drop down to avoid being impaled. He aimed his shotgun up with one hand and pulled the trigger, knocking the first honour guard back.

He followed up with a punch, his fist caving through the weakened armour with ease. He ripped his fist back out again and used his

forearm to block a spear.

The honour guard pulled its weapon back, and the Chief took the sudden opportunity to fall back and pump his shotgun.

"On your six," Cortana warned.

A ranger lunged at him from behind, but he spun around in time to hit it with the stock of the shotgun. It fell to the ground and he placed his shotgun against its chest and fired, the shell ending its electronic existence.

Chief pumped the weapon again and fired once more, bowing a crater a ranger.

An honour guard slashed horizontally at the Chief, aiming low, perhaps to cut him down at the waist.

The Spartan jumped over the weapon and fired his shotgun, knocking that mech back. In the same moment he lashed out with his foot, catching a ranger in the face and knocking it to the ground as well.

Chief landed on one knee, the heavy impact making a dinging noise. He took aim at an approaching honour guard and pumped the weapon three times, filling the automaton with shogun shells.

The creature fell with a resounding thud, revealing yet another honour guard.

The Chief rose up and dived at it, dodging its clumsily counter slash. He hit the creature twice before delivering a deadly uppercut that popped its head straight off.

He grabbed the body before it could drop and spun around with it, using it to block a spear of plasma fired from another staff. It bit into his makeshift shield and melted almost right through.

He tossed the corpse at the honour guard to distract it and the Spartan turned around, firing at a ranger.

It flew back, dead, and his shotgun clicked empty.

He tossed the weapon away and drew his magnum, firing with both hands at another ranger that sought to end him in close combat.

A flurry of ranger shots hit him on his side, burning through layers of metal armour. He aimed his magnum in that direction and squeezed off some shots, killing the last of the rangers.

He fired the last two bullets in his clip at an honour guard, punching two holes in its head.

The Chief ejected the magazine and quickly replaced it. With his other hand he lunged in, his two fingers found the two holes he had just made, and he curled into them, getting a firm grip on his foe.

The honour guard cried out and let go of its staff, reaching up with both hands to grab the Chief's hand.

The honour guard behind him ran in with its spear aimed at the Chief's backside, right where his heart would be.

The Chief pulled, ripping his current foes' head from its shoulders even as it cried out. In the same action he spun around and slammed the head down on the honour guards' spear, snapping it in two pieces.

The honour guard had just enough time to look confused before the Chief's fist crushed its face.

Chief stopped in order to catch his breath. He holstered his magnum and swapped out for his assault rifle. He decided that there was no point in grabbing his shotgun, since there was no more ammunition left in it. He was pretty sure there were more in the _Dawn, _anyways.

He looked around and stared at the marked doors again. The Chief moved towards the blue-marked door, his assault rifle held loosely in his hands. There was a panel set beside the door and, mostly on instinct, the Chief placed his hand over it.

There was a beeping noise, and suddenly a rotating cylinder popped out near the bottom. Small carved runes decorated it, and each shone with an inner light.

Unfortunately, the Chief could not read rune language fluently, and so did not know what to do with the strange device.

"Chief," Cortana began, "rotate it twice and then tap the first rune three times."

There was another explosion, but this one sounded like it had come from inside the facility.

Chief reached out, but hesitated.

"Don't worry," Cortana reassured him. "Nothing will explode."

"It wouldn't be the first time," Chief informed her. Regardless, he still did what she said.

Another click and the cylinder returned to its hiding spot. The panel glowed briefly, and the door unlocked to reveal a small box of a room.

Chief stepped inside. The doors closed behind him, and the room shuddered. A moment later it began upwards.

"An elevator, huh?" Said Cortana. "Must have used tech from the _Dawn._"

Chief just shrugged as the elevator took the pair up. It didn't feel like a normal elevator, it was far too smooth. He mused that they may be trying to use anti-gravity technology.

"I wonder where this leads," Cortana said. "I can't pinpoint anything with all these wild power readings, but it does not seem like this is connected to the main facility."

Another explosion from somewhere.

"Should we have waited for Blue team?" She asked.

Chief did not answer. This was his fight to finish. It had been from the very beginning.

The elevator reached the end of its path, and the door began to inch open.

Suddenly the lights flickered out, and the door jammed.

"Chief," Cortana said in a worried tone, "I'm getting crazy power spikes."

The Chief swore. He dropped his rifle and grabbed the doors with both hands, using the gap to his advantage.

He pulled the doors wide open, ignoring the whine of protest their motors made.

Snapping up his assault rifle, he walked into the dark corridor beyond. The hallway was far longer than any the Chief had been in before. It stretched on for a while.

Doors appeared at random spots, but none seemed to be what he was looking for. Whatever was at the end of this corridor must surely be his target.

The lights suddenly came back on with a flicker, indicating that power had been restored. Chief wasn't too sure why it was going out, but the only possibilities would be the allied army finally breaking in or the mock-Halo using up too much power.

He really didn't want to think about the latter option.

Finally he reached the end of the corridor and came to a set of what were obviously blast doors.

The Chief glared at the doors, unsure of how to open them. Then he spotted the small terminal to the side.

It was cylindrical, and on top was a floating six-sided crystal, bright green in colour. There was also a small gap near the top.

He hesitantly reached to the back of his helmet and removed Cortana's chip. He slotted it into the panel.

The crystal flashed blue, and the blast doors slowly opened. Chief removed the chip and placed it back in its usual spot.

"You think he would have known not to do something like this," Cortana said wryly.

Chief did not have to ask who 'he' was.

The pair entered the large circular chamber.

The floor was made of some form of glass, and below the Chief could

see some sort of large, tree-like device of metal.

Pillars were scattered in a ring around the room, and cylindrical rune consoles were set into each one. They were each being manned by a ranger, but they had hands rather than weapons.

In the centre of the room was a large table-like console set; clearly the master control set.

"Beautiful, is it not?"

The Chief whirled around, his assault rifle set firmly against his shoulder.

Professor Stanwick.

He was tall. Not nearly as tall as the Chief, of course, but still quite tall. Probably around VI's height. His hair was electric blue, and his face was lean and hungry-looking. Over his right eye was a green piece of crystal, and it looked like a targeting lens.

He wore a white lab coat over a beige suit, but that was the least of the Chief's concerns. His biggest priority was the exoskeletal frame surrounding the man.

It was made of a bright, shining metal, and almost fully encased his lines; just a small gap between the metal plates revealed what was beneath. His chest had a frame over it, too, much like a harness for a parachute.

His left shoulder was form-fitting plate, but his right shoulder was a large, rectangular slab of metal.

His legs, unlike his arms, were only armoured on the outer portions. His knees were covered by circular metal pieces.

The Chief felt nothing when he looked at Stanwick. He had expected anger, or at least annoyance - this was, after all, the man who had single-handedly used the UNSC's technology to bring ruin to an entire continent.

But he felt nothing. Perhaps when he ended this he would feel something, but right now...

Stanwick smirked. "Pondering something? Coming to grips with your own demise?"

"Screw off, madman," Cortana retorted angrily.

"So the AI is here too." Stanwick nodded, as if he had expected it all along. "You should have stayed where you belonged, machine."

"I am where I belong," Cortana said, practically seething with anger.

"I was not talking to you," the mad scientist said. "Why does everyone feel the need to ruin my great pl-"

He was cut off when the Chief fired his assault rifle - he got quickly tired of the conversation.

The bullets were stopped a hand away from Stanwick's face. A shimmering shield had sprung into existence around the man, protecting him.

The look of shock on Stanwick's face was enough to make Cortana laugh in amusement.

Stanwick's expression turned to anger. He lifted his left arm and levelled it at the Chief. The golden bands around his fore-arm plating began to glow, as if gathering energy. The glow raced down the man's arm and into his fingers, as if his fingers were targeting mechanisms.

A bright golden beam sprung out from the mad scientists finger tips, aimed right for the foreign soldier.

The Chief took the shot full in the chest. He had not been expecting the shot, but he still could have dodged it. He just reasoned this would be a good test of just how strong Stanwick's systems really were.

Chief's shields dropped a quarter.

"We should probably avoid that," Cortana suggested.

Stanwick did the same action with his right arm, and another beam sprung into existence.

Chief dodged left, and the beam hitting nothing but empty air. He hip-fired his assault rifle, opting for maneuverability than accuracy. It didn't seem to matter, though; Stanwick's shields took the bullets without so much as a flare.

Another beam was sent out from Stanwick's left hand. The beam came close to the Chief, and its proximity sent a wave of static rippling across his shields.

His AR quickly chewed through the rest of the magazine, spitting bullets at Stanwick in a vain attempt to break through his shields.

Stanwick, perhaps hearing the metal click of an empty rifle, redoubled his efforts. He sent two more beams crashing towards the Chief, but a quick roll from said target made both hit nothing.

Chief ran, ejecting the clip from his assault rifle as he did so. He reached his hand out for a replacement that was at hip.

Plasma struck the ground just in front of the Chief, forcing him to stop what he was doing and move back. He glanced over at Stanwick, and he tensed.

Both of Stanwick's hands were glowing with barely contained energy. He brought them together, plasma sparking between them, before raising them up high. He made a motion similar to that of throwing a heavy boulder.

A bright ball of raw plasma hurtled through the air towards the

Spartan. The light was just bright enough that the Chief's visor auto-polarized " but only a little bit.

The Chief jumped backwards just as the ball hit the glass floor. The heat sent ripples across his shields as per usual, but it was intense enough to start draining them. The Chief was forced to twist his body into a backflip so he could get further away from the danger zone.

He landed heavily on the floor, his shields no worse than before. Miraculously, the glass beneath his feet did not instantly crack like he suspected it would.

But the area that was hit by the plasma bomb did not fare nearly as well. There was a perfect circle cut into to it, the edges bright red.

Stanwick's expression turned to one of shock.

Chief started running towards his foe. He kept a tight hold on his assault rifle in his right hand, but drew his left back for a deadly punch.

Stanwick's own fist shot out, almost as fast as the Chief's. It was just fast enough to catch the Spartans punch in his palm.

Chief pushed against Stanwick, pitting their strengths against each other. While the Chief was clearly the stronger of the two - as was demonstrated by the Spartan slowly pushing back Stanwick - Stanwick's armour clearly provided him with incredible strength.

Even worse, his shields seemed to be holding up far better than the Chief's.

Annoyance quickly flashed across the scientists face. He lifted his free hand and pointed it at his foe.

Chief huffed and drove his shoulder into Stanwick's chest - normally he would have gone for the stomach area, but as it was he was too tall for that.

Stanwick grunted as all the air was forced from his chest.

The Chief used the position to flip Stanwick over his shoulder, slamming him into the ground with a heavy thud.

Stanwick recovered quickly as the Chief turned towards him. He slammed both his palms into the ground, and a shockwave of energy erupted around him.

The Chief was hit full force by the blast. His shields took a tiny hit, bringing them down to slightly lower than half, but he was tossed backwards all the same.

He skidded across the glass floor on his back, his shields flaring and his assault rifle tightly gripped in right hand.

The mad scientist stood up straight and brought both his hands together, palm-to-palm. Energy collected around his fingertips, sparks flying off in random directions.

Chief turned around and ran for the nearest pillar. He ignored the ranger typing away in front of it and took cover behind it, crouching down for maximum efficiency.

A bright beam sliced through the pillar not even a moment later, cutting through the layers of metal and stone just above Chief's head in less than a second.

Ranger body parts came crumbling down on the Spartan. The head rolled down and came to a stop right by Chief's foot.

The beam continued to pan across; its energy seemed to be sustained rather than a quick charge-burst.

Chief snapped a new clip into his rifle and sprung out of cover, using the clean-cut top to brace his weapon. He fired the full magazine at Stanwick, whose shields began to flash brighter and brighter.

When they finally exploded, Chief was already moving towards their bearer.

Stanwick raised both hands together above his head, repeating the same action from before.

In an instant the Chief ripped his knife out of his shoulder sheath and flipped it around so he was holding it by the blade with his index finger and thumb.

He threw it with deadly accuracy. On instinct Stanwick tried to stop it, and the knife was embedded in his hand.

He yelled in pain as the Chief crashed into him, swinging his fist to get his assailant off of him.

Chief grappled with the man, trying to land some solid hits. Stanwick was clever, though, and was slipping out of the Spartans hold.

The Chief reached for his knife and pulled it out. He grabbed Stanwick by his tie and pulled him forwards into knife range.

Stanwick's hand struck out and grabbed the knife blade. Energy was leaking off his palm, and the knife was becoming strangely malleable in the Chief's hands.

He let go of the weapon, and it fell to the ground as a red-hot lump.

In that split second of inaction, Stanwick thrust his palms at the floor again. A shockwave ripples out and slammed the Chief back once more, and his assault rifle skidded away from him.

Stanwick began to move away, turning towards some panel set into the wall.

"Shit," Cortana swore. "Is he running?"

The Chief did not get the opportunity to answer. Half a dozen rangers

ran into the room from the open doorways, and they immediately locked onto the Spartan.

Chief drew out his magnum and fired at the first automaton, taking it down with a swift headshot.

The rest returned fire, slashing across his shields and slowly draining them.

Five more shots rang out, signaling the deaths of the remaining automatons.

A loud banging noise, followed by a series of thuds, drew the Chief's attention back to the mad scientist.

Stanwick operated quickly; the Chief was forced to concede. Where before Stanwick was clad in a form-fitting exoskeleton, he was now encased in a bulky suit of armour eerily reminiscent of mark IV powered assault armour. The smooth and curved plates were bright silver, trimmed in gold. Electric blue power cables connected the back-mounted power source to the rest of the armour. Stanwick's face was still visible, though; it was encased in a glass dome helmet reminiscent of the ranger helmets. All in all, it had a vague resemblance to the armour Marin had worn â€" although this one was clearly upgraded.

"H-how did he change so quickly?" Cortana asked quietly. "Even rough estimates show that it should have taken five times longer, and your suit would have taken at least ten times longer with assistance."

Chief gazed into the metal cradle that had held the power suit. "He must have been an automated arming sequence," he concluded.

Stanwick thudded forwards, and the Chief took a step back. Stanwick laughed.

"He's charging up again," Cortana noted. True enough, Stanwick's gauntlets were gathering energy once more.

Chief turned to run, but for once he wasn't fast enough. The high-intensity shot hit him high in the shoulder, and instantly destroyed his already weakened shields.

"There's significantly more power in these shots," Cortana informed him. "Though I won't bore you with numbers."

The Chief was thankful for small miracles. When the next shot rang out he dropped to the ground, and the shot flew over his head. He spun around, aimed his magnum with one hand.

All of his shots hit their intended target: Stanwick's helmet. However, they seemed to achieve nothing other than chip the object.

"â€|Damn," Chief swore.

Stanwick took another heavy step forward, steam hissing from the joints of his armour. He raised his left hand, letting the power build up around his fingertips.

The Chief turned immediately and ran for cover. He was under no illusion that he could handle the energy beams. One direct hit would see him severely wounded.

As he took refuge behind another pillar the beam of plasma sparked into life. It hit a spot dangerously close to the Chief's head, cutting right through the pillar and leaving a fist-sized hole behind.

The Chief quickly swapped magazines for his magnum, noting his low ammunition count. He would need to make every bullet worth it from this point onwards. He could hear a series of thuds that were slowly gathering intensity; Stanwick was running.

Chief tensed as the thuds grew close.

Stanwick smashed into the pillar, swinging left with his right arm. Pieces of rubble and ranger parts tumbled around the massively armoured scientist, but the Spartan was not within his sight. In fact, the moment before the impact, the Chief had already been moving. As Stanwick swung left Chief slipped right, away from the danger zone and inside Stanwick's guard.

Chief placed the barrel of his magnum against a gap in the scientists heavy armour. He pulled the trigger three times in quick succession.

Stanwick yelled in pain and swung out wide, forcing the Chief away. The scientist then brought his fists up high and slammed them down on the ground, sending out another shockwave. This one was more potent than before, though, and it knocked the Chief far away.

He slid across the glass on his front, gripping his magnum almost painfully tight. He finally slid to a halt man meters away from Stanwick, and his entire body was sore. Not enough to hinder him, but certainly enough to make him uncomfortable.

His neck creaked as he looked at Stanwick, who was staring at him wide-eyed. His fists were still against the ground; he had not gotten back up.

Chief rose up on his arms, curling one leg upwards so he could use his knee as leverage.

Sharp sounds greeted the Chief's ears. Cracks sprung outwards from beneath the Chief's palms, spreading outwards like a spider's web.

Very carefully the Chief turned back to Stanwick, who was trying to regain his balance. Larger cracks were appearing beneath the man's feet.

The Chief tried to raise his hand in a halting gesture, but all it succeeded in doing was making more cracks.

Stanwick took a heavy step forwards, and the glass floor shattered.

The Chief found himself suddenly and abruptly falling into the

chamber below. Glass shards of varying sizes fell around him, catching the light from the reactors in brilliant ways.

Chief looked down at the tree-like reactor below, taking in dozens of details in a single instant. Large walkway-spires reached out from the central pillar in rings, and in between each of those rings were platforms of varying sizes. Massive pipes lined the walls of the chamber, leading down into the darkness at the bottom.

Stanwick's enraged howls drew the Chief's attention upwards. The mad scientist had tried to arrest his fall by grabbing on to the remains of a broken pillar, but all that had achieved was slowing him down. He was above the Chief, now, but was falling fast towards him.

Chief let him draw close. He fired upwards with his magnum, but both of his shots rebounded off of curved armour plates.

Stanwick stretched out his arms as he came in close. He assumed that the Chief would not be able to dodge in such conditions; he was, of course, wrong. The Chief's armour had, by default, a set of limited thrusters in the back-pack generator. Generally they were used for zero-g operations, where the limited thrust would be compensated by the lack of—well, pretty much everything. In this situation, though, it succeeded in allowing the Chief to make a quick position correction.

Stanwick fired his finger lasers as the Chief boosted slightly to the left, and the beams missed entirely. The Spartan then turned his body so he was spread eagle, slowing his descent down even further.

Stanwick grimaced as he came alongside the Spartan. His eyes locked on the barrel of the magnum.

The rest of the clip slammed into Stanwick's helmet, and at this range there was no chance of it staying intact.

Stanwick may have not been a super soldier, but he was still a highly intelligent scientist. As his glass helmet cracked and the magnum rounds spiraled into the dome, he moved his head in the direction of those bullets.

He knew the rounds would not ricochet off the glass, but there was a chance of them curving. By moving in the direction they were coming from, he avoided them entirely - minus a single bullet cut along his cheek and glass shards in his face, of course.

At the same time, Stanwick thrust his left arm out at the Chief, sending him tumbling away. Unfortunately, the sudden thrust also sent the scientist tumbling away.

Chief tried to halt his ascent by spreading his limbs out, and partially succeeded. The only problem was that he was already far too close to one of those branch-like spires to arrest his descent.

He landed as his training dictated, going low and rolling to a proper stop. The impact was still hard on him, and it jarred his already weakened legs.

He rose up from his position, noticing the large dent he had made in

branch. He ejected the clip in his magnum and snapped in his final magazine.

Chief looked up. His gaze travelled along the massive central pillar until he got to the giant shattered glass floor. It was quite a ways up, and he knew there was no chance of getting out that way.

"Chief," Cortana voiced in warning. Chief tore his attention away and looked to the branch to his right.

Stanwick was getting up unsteadily. Steam hissed from ports in his armour, wreathing his form in fog. Periodic bursts of electricity danced across his armour, indicating that heavy damage had been suffered.

Chief raised his magnum at his foe, but decided against firing. He did not want to waste his ammo at this range, especially since Stanwick's armour would protect him.

The mad scientist had no such qualms; he raised his right arm and allowed energy to gather around it.

Since there was no place for Chief to take cover, he just opted to tense and try to dodge. Once the beam sizzled into life and shot out towards him, the Chief rolled right. Dodging proved to be unnecessary, though, as Stanwick had failed to compensate for the distance and the shot had fallen short.

He lifted up his arm for another attack, this time his aim dead-on. But as the plasma shot out towards the Chief, he simply side-stepped the shot.

That got Stanwick mad, mad enough that the Chief could see it from far away. Stanwick set his legs shoulder width apart and brought his arms in, making a weird pose. Ports opened up on his shoulder pads, revealing carefully arranged purple warheads.

"That's unexpected," Cortana said unhelpfully.

Chief looked to the opposite end of the branch, where it connected to the main structure, and then looked back to Stanwick.

He started running.

Pink light gathered around the warheads. After a few seconds they all fired simultaneously, leaving pink contrails through the air as they scattered and homed in on the Spartan.

Chief raced towards the main structure as the missiles raced towards him. When they were finally upon him, he suddenly dropped and reversed directions.

The missiles flew straight over him and slammed into the branch, exploding in colourful clouds of smoke.

There was a sudden, loud groaning noise. The smoke still obscured the point of impact, but the Chief knew what had happened: the missiles had eaten through the supports of the branch. As a consequence of that, the branch began to tilt right as it ripped free of the central

pillar.

Stanwick watched the situation impassively, and raise both his arms to fire. What he did not seem to realize was that his spire, too, was beginning to rip free.

The branch structures were not individually attached to the spire, the Chief had understood. They were welded to a metal ring around it. When one ripped free, the other ones near it were structurally weakened also.

Stanwick's shots went wild as the branch beneath his feet gave way. It tilted heavily to the left, on a direct collision course for the Chief's branch.

Stanwick tried to keep his balance on the structure, while the Chief was having no trouble at all due to his mag-locked boots.

The two large structures hit each other with an ear-splitting shriek of metal-on-metal and a bone-jarring impact. The conjoined branches then began to fall towards the bottom of the circular chamber, taking their occupants with them.

The Chief focused on closing the distance to Stanwick, regardless of the tilted and falling ground beneath his feet. Stanwick took notice of him and tried to punch the Spartan, but lost his balance in the process.

Chief grabbed his arm and twisted, further putting Stanwick off balance. He swung his magnum around and tried to line it up with Stanwick's head.

Stanwick swept out with his leg. The action caused him to fall over, but succeeded in dislodging the Chief.

The branch-spires cracked beneath their feet, the strain finally too much for their weakened structures. The fallen Stanwick slipped off the edge with a yell, and escaped the Chief's sight. The cracks appeared beneath the Chief's mag-locked boots, forcing him to move. That proved to be a mistake, though, as he moved off the cracked metal onto collapsing plates.

Chief slipped off, falling for the second time in less than ten minutes.

He mused that, perhaps, today just wasn't his day.

He slammed into the ground with enough force to knock the wind out of his lungs. He was sprawled out on his front, his magnum held loosely in his hand.

He could taste blood in his mouth. His body ached. His motion sensor had a red contact ahead of him.

Chief shook his head and looked up. Across from him, some distance away, was Stanwick. He was struggling to rise, smoke pouring from his armour in greater quantities than before. Chief's eyes focused on something further behind Stanwick: an MA5D assault rifle, the one he had dropped earlier.

The Chief stood up rather shakily. The shields bar at the top of his HUD was still empty and flashing red, and alarms still blared into his ears.

Stanwick was on one knee, but still found the strength in himself to raise his arm and fire a shot of plasma at the Chief.

The Spartan was too slow to dodge the shot; it took him high in his left shoulder, burning right through armour and into his flesh.

The Chief was taken aback by the shot, giving Stanwick just enough time to rise up and take aim with his other arm.

Chief made a quick decision and, after holstering his pistol, reached down to his waist to grab a small spherical object. He had wanted to save it, but he needed to use it now.

He flicked the activation switch and told Stanwick to catch.

The mad scientist tried to move his heavily armoured right shoulder in the way of the object. The ball hit his shoulder and stuck fast, glowing a bright blue all the while.

Stanwick stared at it for a moment before realization dawned, and he tried to move his face away as the plasma grenade exploded. Since the plasma grenade had been stuck to a more reinforced section of armour it did not have as great of an effect as the Chief had hoped. Nonetheless, the grenade vaporized a large section of the shoulder plate and some arm plating, revealing coiled cables and ribbed tubing.

By that point, the Chief was already on the move. He ran straight at Stanwick, using the distraction caused by his plasma grenade to close in without being shot at.

Stanwick still tried to stop him, raising his arm for a close-ranged shot.

The Chief jumped and grabbed a hold of Stanwick's ruined armour plate. He dug his fingers into the melted hole and swung himself around, out of Stanwick's arc of fire.

Chief grabbed hold of the tube that connected Stanwick's left gauntlet to his back generator, and pulled.

It snapped free, and immediately a burst of compressed energy slammed into the Spartan, dislodging him and knocking him away.

"Chief, are you making a habit of being slammed aside?" Cortana asked him.

"Trying to get the high score," Chief said sarcastically, staring at Stanwick, who was in a complete panic. His left arm was no longer responding, as all power had been cut and he was too weak to lift it on his own.

Chief took a brief glance around, and noticed that his assault rifle was within easy reach. He reached out for it, scooped it up, and replaced the magazine with a fresh one.

"Chief! Dodge!"

On instinct the Chief rolled to the right, avoiding a sharp burst of plasma that burned through the metal grating he had been sitting on.

Stanwick raised his arm again, waiting to fire.

Chief raised his assault rifle in turn.

Suddenly, there was the sound of something immense cycling up. The pipes along the sides of the chamber sprung into life, yellow fluids lighting them up like lightning strikes. Steam hissed from carefully placed valves, indicating an intense power build-up. Branches began to glow as energy suffused them.

The edges of Chief's platform came alive as something rose up: an octagonal ring-like structure. It rose two-thirds up the central structure, locking into place alongside another set of branches. It then began to rotate, exponentially picking up speed. At the same time, the Chief's sensor lit up with dozens of hostile contacts.

Stanwick looked up at his creation, and basked in its magnificence. In fact, the mad scientist seemed almost invigorated by its presence.

"Do you see now?!" the scientist yelled. "There isn't a chance in hell that you can win. You have enough time to kill me or stop this, but you definitely can't do both!"

"He might be right, Chief," Cortana said. "That machine is going to go off in exactly four minutes and thirty-nine seconds. Kill him, you won't have enough time. If you let him liveâ€¦"

"He'll have enough time to kill us," Chief finished for her. With the resources Stanwick had at his disposal, such a thing would be entirely possible. And even if he just tried to escape, the Chief didn't want to give him time to start this war all over again. He knew well enough how quickly the scientist worked.

"Why?" Chief asked Stanwick. "You can't rule if everyone is dead."

"I don't want to rule!" Stanwick shouted back. "I want to bring an age of enlightenment upon us all! Clearly, though, your pathetic excuses for human life cannot comprehend that, so you must be exterminated in order for a more competent race to arise!"

Stanwick raised his right arm again. "One which you will not be a part of," he promised.

A spear of green plasma speared through Stanwick's damaged shoulder armour, tearing through it with unexpected efficiency.

Stanwick managed to half turn while keeping face protected, revealing the black-clad figure standing behind him.

The figure was wearing a black bodysuit that was ripped and burnt. His chest featured numerous small blood-scabbed holes, evidence of

recent injections. He held a plasma sniper rifle in his hands, reminiscent of a Covenant beam rifle, but black in colour. His face was pale, almost bloodless, and much too gaunt to be healthy. His hair was a wild black mess, streaked through with silver. His eyes were silver also " like storm clouds that held the potential of thunder.

"Marin," Stanwick said, his face stony. "Why come back when you've failed in your duty?"

Marin fired again, hitting Stanwick in his opposite shoulder. The beam did not penetrate quite as far as before, although Chief assumed it was because that armour was far more intact.

"You wouldâ€|" Stanwick's voice was shaky with anger. "DARE to shoot your employer? You signed the contract!"

Marin took a step forwards, his sniper rifle never wavering from his target. "Page two, paragraph three, subsection 6," Marin recited. "The contents of this contract is considered null and void if the person designated as the EMPLOYER breaches any terms as set out by the EMPLOYEE, including, but not limited to: attempted assassination of the EMPLOYEE, refusing to pay then fee of the EMPLOYEE, or the killing of people not designated by the contract."

Marin tilted his head. "Did you not just say that you plan on killing innocents? That is highly contradictory to our terms."

Stanwick blinked. "I see. You would have been far better off dead."

Marin spared a glance for the Chief. "We can settle our fight another time," he said. "I'll take care of him; you take care of the machine."

Stanwick growled and raised his arm at the former mech commander.

Chief nodded. "See you on the fields of justice," he told Marin, and took off towards the central pillar.

Marin merely raised an eyebrow at the suggestion. With a flick of his finger his rifle opened up, switching to its suppression mode.

Marin and Stanwick fired at the exact same moment.

* * *

><p>The Chief dug his fingers into the grating that surrounded the large pillar, and pulled himself up. He could not disable the weapon from down here, because the command consoles were in the room far above. Cortana had, however, placed a marker on the zone where the highest energy concentration was.<p>

It was a slim hope, but if he could overload that energy point and cause a chain reaction inside the large machineâ€|

Bullets started to rain down from above, pinging off the Chief's armour plates. He looked up, only to see a few rangers peering over the edge of an alcove.

"Chief, Stanwick must have called reinforcements," Cortana reported. "I am getting dozens of hostile contacts."

Chief ignored the burning sensation in his arms and focused on pulling himself up, making his own hand holds in the hard metal.

A couple of bullets managed to find weak points in his armour, but he shrugged off the wounds. They were negligible at best; not nearly enough to slow a Spartan down.

But as more bullets rained down, the Chief found himself slowing. The countdown timer in the corner of his visor was counting down steadily.

The Chief resumed his climb, redoubling his effort. Punch. Pull. Punch. Pull. Punch.

Pull. Just above him was the alcove.

A ranger leaned out just a bit too far to land its shots, and the Chief grabbed it by the foot. He pulled hard, and the ranger dropped down the platform below.

The Chief rose up into the alcove, punching the head off the other ranger as he did so.

"Chief, I don't think we can make it to the power source," Cortana said hesitantly.

The Chief looked up, and calculated that Cortana may indeed be correct. It was another far climb, and it would take far too much time just to get up there, let alone destroy what needed to be destroyed.

Chief looked around. "What about these pipes?"

"What about â€" oh." Cortana processed for a moment. "If you can take out both pipes valves, you ma â€" "

Cortana continued speaking, but the Chief tuned her out as soon as she said 'may'. The pipes were clumped against the alcove. Multi-coloured Liquid was being pumped through them and up into the structure's insides.

The Chief fired his assault rifle on fully automatic. The bullets tore through the protective housings, spilling much of the liquid inside. It poured out and spilled around the Chief's feet until reached the edge and spilled off like a waterfall.

It was a lot of liquid, butâ€| it didn't seem like it had any real effect.

"Chief, I don't think it's having any real effect on it," Cortana said, almost comically unnecessarily.

The Chief hesitated for a moment. "Cortana, I need you to open the reactor ports and send the power through my shielding systems â€" "

"Whoa, Chief. A total-shield overload might not even work here â€" this is a big machine. Not to mention it might completely burn out your shield systems â€" permanently. Not to mention the potential damage to your own electric nervous system â€" "

"It's fine," Chief repeated, glancing at the countdown timer.

Hazard symbols flashed across his visor, indicating that several seals had been opened. Almost instantly he felt a surge of static electricity and tasted ozone. His shield bar began to refill with sudden intensity â€" surging up from empty to blue, indicating a full charge. Even then it continued to fill, the blue bar filling up to red.

Another wave of static passed through the Chief, more forceful than before. The bar climbed past red and into green, indicating a fully overcharged shielding system.

Of course, there was only one thing left for the Chief to do. He placed his fist against the liquid-soaked pipe, and manually detonated his shields.

The resulting shockwave travelled up along the pipes and into the inner structure. The blast was of sufficient strength that it buffeted the Chief back and tore the breath right out of him. He placed his hand on his chest and breathed heavily, trying to shake the feeling of lightning coursing through his skin. His shield bar was completely empty, but not flashing â€" just empty, grey. His radar was down also; it was showing nothing more than a constantly refreshing blue circle.

There was no immediate effect to his detonation, and that worried Chief. He couldn't quite concentrate on it, though; his head felt like it was being squeezed to the point of bursting. Not to mention his chest that felt as if it was being constructed by several large serpents.

The timer in the corner of his visor was still steadily counting down.

Twenty
seconds.

Nineteen.

Eighteen.

Seventeen.

Sixteen.

Fifteen.

Something somewhere started to whine. It was the sound of machinery that was straining to do something it could not handle doing; the sound of machinery at its breaking point.

Steam suddenly burst from every valve and pump in the room, instantly obscuring everything in sight with heavy white clouds.

Pipes mounted along the sides of the walls burst in quick succession, almost as if timed by an orchestrator. Multi-coloured liquid flashed through the clouds, appearing like bursts of a rainbow.

There was an explosion from somewhere above the Chief's head; it was loud and powerful, and a good sign. The machine was breaking apart.

Another seven seconds ticked down, and twice that number of explosions happened. The entire mock halo was destroying itself from the inside out. Pieces of metal began to rain down on the Spartan, ranging from small shards to massive chunks that could, potentially, cause serious damage.

"Chief, we need to move," Cortana pressured him. "Being this close to an exploding objectâ€¦"

The Chief forced himself to his feet. He mag-locked his assault rifle to his back and moved to the alcove's edge. It was a far drop down, and an even further climb up.

A noise very much like something unlocking reverberated around the chamber. The fog from above began to disperse as something large displaced it.

"â€¦Chiefâ€¦"

The bottom edge of the large, octagonal ring was revealed as it plummeted down. It zoomed past the Chief and smashed down into the platform far below and, though the Chief couldn't see it due to the amount of fog, he could hear the noise of the platform being torn apart.

He could hear a distant screaming. Was that Marin, or Stanwick? Both?

More debris followed the ring, as well as sparks and balls of fire. Each second saw more debris fall, and it was evident the whole room was going to be filled with rubble in no time at all. His best chance at survival would be to jump down and try and find some other way to escape, some back door that Stanwick may have installed.

A loud crack.

The Master Chief looked up and saw a massive panel, easily the half the height of the entire structure, come loose.

It fell straight down, right into the alcove.

And everything went black.

* * *

><p>If one were in Piltover, looking at the skyline of Zaun, they would have been perplexed to see the buildings sink an inch into the ground, as if everything was sinking. they would not be far off, either.<p>

The shock-wave from the mock Halo collapse spread out far, effecting the entire bay. Boats were thrown wild and the waves began to rage

like some eldritch creature had control of them.

The sky turned cloudy and smoky, with hints of lightning in the midst.

In fact, it seemed almost like an end-of-the-world scenario.

And then, just as abruptly as it came, it stopped.

* * *

><p>Sorry about the long update, My USB got corrupted and I needed to do a full re-write.

as always, enjoy the chapter and review if at all possible.

C Ya!

49. Chapter 49

Forewords!

Putting this here just because. See, university just started for me, and I didn't have the time to finish up the last bit of this chapter(weak excuse, I know), but I wanted to make sure this chapter was... OK. I'm not so good at endings, I think, so...

This comment here if for the reviewer John, who asked who the champs Chief related too were. Would answered this in a PM, btw, but I seemed t be unable to send you one. Guest account, maybe? Anyways, they're pretty straight forwards: Riven, Yauso, Graves, Kayle, Irelia, Ashe (not going to explain why, my thought process is messed)

* * *

><p>Chapter 49: Reveille<p>

Riven tilted her head back and took in the rows upon rows of cages. There were hundreds - maybe thousands- in the massive underground chamber.

It was all made worse when Riven saw that each and every one was packed with people, each one dressed in the manner and style of Zaun. They were practically compressed into the small cells, not even a hands-worth of space between them.

The entire population of Zaun was stuffed into Stanwick's underground facility.

"Why are we stopping?" Draven demanded. His gaze was fixed forwards, completely ignoring the citizens in their cages.

"Quiet, fool," Darius said to him quietly. He was staring at the surrounding prison cells with concern.

"Why can't we hear them?" LeBlanc inquired, her head tilted in just the right way to show that she did not really care for the answer.

"Sound proof materials," Darius said with a shrug.
"Probably."

"Sound proof glass?" LeBlanc preformed her head tilt again.

Riven shrugged. She'd seen enough of the Chief's technology to recognize knock-offs when she saw them. Still, it was somewhat disturbing to see the shouting Zaunite faces without hearing their cries.

"Are we just gunna wait here, or are we gunna go ahead and do this?" Draven demanded. "Draaaaaven really wants to get this show on the road."

"Advancing would be prudent," LeBlanc said, her feet already carrying her forwards.

Riven hesitated. She wanted to push onwards - she really, really did - but she couldn't bring herself to leave the room.

"Stop moving and be quiet," Darius ordered. "We are not leaving these people here."

"But-" Draven looked at a loss for words. "The battle is going on without us. The Chief's already inside!"

Riven grimaced. It was true, the Chief was far ahead of them. In truth, that was the only reason she wanted to go on ahead - she couldn't just let him do this by himself. That just did not sit right with her.

But at the same time, the Chief would have certainly tried to get as many people out as possible. That was the only reason she found herself agreeing with the hand of Noxus.

LeBlanc gave her a particularly withering glare. "Still thinking like a traitor, then."

She made it sound like a statement.

"I believe whole-heartedly in what Noxus used to be," Riven told her. "I just don't believe in what it has become."

"Stop blathering and start opening up these cells," Darius barked. While the Champions had been talking he had already organized the Noxian soldiers into groups, and all of them were trying to open up the prison cells.

With one last wistful look at the path ahead, Riven got to work.

Her muscles burned from the effort of opening jail-cells - they were jammed shut and very well locked. Nonetheless, she and the rest if the Noxians managed to free every last imprisoned citizen.

By the end, Riven half-wished that she was contained by sound-proof glass. The noise from the excited citizens was unbearable. They all pushed and pulled in their attempt to be the first to escape. And it was starting to get on the Exile's nerves.

But she could sort-of understand their excitement. This underground facility was not exactly welcoming. It was dark, damp, automatons were crawling about, and periodic explosions were rocking the facility.

"Too many people for Draven to handle," Draven said as he came up beside Riven. "You think anyone would mind if I executed a few?"

Riven sent him a sharp look.

"Just to make this go quicker," Draven added.

A second glare was enough to stop Draven from spouting out anymore awful ideas.

A booming noise rang out across the chamber; the sound of something heavy impacting against the ground. Not even a moment later the lights began to flicker, and a harsh whine echoed across the chamber as the electronics tried to start up again.

The Zaun citizens began to panic even more. They pushed against each other and into Noxian soldiers, rushing to escape. The Noxian soldiers, for their part, got thoroughly annoyed with the prisoners and began to man-handle them roughly.

It only added to the chaos.

"We need to calm them down," Riven muttered, mostly to herself.

Draven heard and hefted an axe.

A series of explosions rang out across the chamber. They started out as dull noise, but grew in intensity until it sounded as if it were happening in the exact same room.

The lights gave out completely, and the room began to shake. Pipes that ran through seams in the room detonated in near harmony, showering the yelling crowds with metal shards. Fire exploded out from cracks, shedding eerie light across the room.

"What the hell?"

Draven actually sounded surprised.

Riven started forwards, moving to the pathway that led deeper into the facility.

A hand tugged her back.

"Not a good idea," Draven said, shaking his head.

Riven tried to shake him off and continue forwards.

Darius appeared before her and pushed her back roughly, much in the same way one would push a bag of wheat.

The room shook violently, as if some giant creature was shaking it with their hands. Dull booms echoed out as steam valves

imploded.

"Time to leave," he said gruffly, practically dragging Riven alongside him.

Small pieces of plaster, wood, and a generous amount of dust fell down from the ceiling. Some got into Riven's eyes, forcing her to blink rapidly to clear them.

It wasn't working very well. She raised her hand and rubbed her eyes furiously, concentrating more on clearing them than rebelling against Darius.

When she opened her eyes again, ignoring the itchiness, she was greeted by the sight of the entrance corridor in flames.

* * *

><p>Yasuo twirled his sword around, blocking a sword aimed for his throat and countering with a sharp jab. He whipped his sword out as quickly as possible and twirled around; decapitating another ranger-pattern automaton before it could back stab him.<p>

"This place is falling apart," Graves said to the Ronin. As if to add to add weight to his words, a large rebar slammed into the ground several meters away. Chunks of marble fell down right after, crushing automatons beneath them.

Yasuo looked around the room, taking note of the dozens upon dozens of rangers. He had been fighting for the better part of an hour, breaking through a series of massive rooms that looked like arming chambers. If the number of mechs they found was any indication, than this was where Stanwick was storing his automaton army.

The wanderer couldn't even begin to count how many soldiers had died along the way. If he was perfectly honest with himself, he wasn't entirely sure he even cared; but it seemed wrong regardless to die in a stupid place like this.

He really hoped the Chief wasn't dead in this stupid place.

Yasuo dropped to one knee, thrusting his energy-blade outwards to impale a ranger along its length. He rose up, bringing his free hand up to wipe the sweat from his eyes. Normally his helmet would take care of the whole sweating thing, but he had lost that a while ago.

After he had used it to beat the crap out of a ranger, of course.

He licked his lips and half turned to Graves. "Do you think â€"

"

"The Chief's fine," Graves said with utter conviction. He had his characteristic cigar in his mouth, but it wasn't lit. Hell, Yasuo was sure the gunner just had the thing for show.

"But â€"

"You are dumb," Graves announced, "and you should feel dumb." He pulled the trigger of his shotgun and a heavy explosive round exited

the chamber, thundering into a large group of rangers and shredding them to pieces.

"That was my last explosive canister," Graves announced as he reloaded his shotgun. "We should honestly leave right now."

"There are too many soldiers still stuck in the fight," Yasuo said. He had to summon a windwall to block incoming plasma fire. The sheer volume of plasma was ruining the integrity of the shield, dissipating the air currents that were once so good at keeping projectiles away.

Sudden abrupt motions heralded the arrival of a new Champion. Within seconds the block of firing rangers was cut apart, separated limbs flying off in perfect harmony.

Master Yi appeared for the briefest of moments, his sword glowing a bright green. He set off again just as quickly as he had arrived, dashing into more automatons.

Yasuo felt a hand on his shoulder. Shen came up into view, stepping almost protectively in front of him. "It is time to leave," he said, every word carefully measured.

"What about everyone else?" Yasuo inquired. Again, it wasn't like he cared about them. It justâ€¦. Really sucked to die in a place like this.

Yeah.

"There is â€" "

Shen's voice was cut off by a deep rumbling.

Yasuo, by chance, looked up at the ceiling, and saw the massive cracks lining the ceiling. They were widening with frightening rapidity.

"Oh, hell," Graves breathed out.

"Alright," Yasuo announced. "Time to go."

* * *

><p>Kolminye flinched back from the exploding pipe, the excessive amount of burning liquid easily enough to burn her right through. It was entirely unnecessary, though, as the golden shield that encased her body made her invulnerable to all forms of damage.<p>

She had to remember to give Kayle a proper thank-you later. At the very least, something better than the nod she sent to the angel behind her.

"Let's hurry," Kolminye suggested in her best this-is-a-command-not-a-suggestion tone.

As always, the angel did not respond. She was the strong silent type, only speaking when she had something important to contribute. In other words, she made for poor company. At least she was good at taking orders, and doubly useful in a fight.

They turned a corner, avoiding the tumbling wheel-like object that came loose from the ceiling. The entire station was coming apart â€" every single pipe that had fed power into Stanwick's underground facility had suddenly overloaded, very nearly turning the entire building into one spectacular fireball.

Luckily, Kolminye and a few other on-hand Summoners had quelled the fire with their magic, but still. Too close for comfort.

And now she was trying to escape.

It really sucked, she had to admit.

As she ran, she briefly entertained the thought that maybe; just maybe, keeping the Master Chief for so long hadn't been such a good idea. Perhaps getting him back to his own dimension would have been far better in the long term. Much of this conflict â€" and this risk on her life â€" would have been avoided.

She had known, of course, of the potential problems the Spartan posed. Dimension were not supposed to merge, unless a clear set of rules were established between them the two angels had made that far too clear.

Had she been blinded by the potential power?

â€|No. She had to conclude no. She was smarter than that. And then there was the fact that time was not so malleable that a single action would change everything for the better; fate tended to take the same path, although with distinct variations. For better or worseâ€|

â€|Well. That was much harder to predict.

The two rounded another bend in the hall. Kayle was forced to run just as Kolminye, since there was not enough room for her wings to be opened fully.

Kolminye peered cautiously around, making sure there was nothing to impede their progress. Naturally, there were. They were engaged in combat with two Demacian soldiers and a Demacian fencer.

The female fencer was sword fighting against two of the larger zealot-pattern automatons, her rapier flashing out to meet the red swords before they could land critical blows.

It was beautiful, in a strangely morbid way, Kolminye had to conclude. Despite the two red swords being far longer and much heavier, the silver rapier deflected each blow at just the precise moment to deliver a counter attack. It seemed that despite being two-on-one, the two were suffering far more than the one.

The Demacian swept around the second mech, causing it to stumble, and switched targets. The grand duelist flicked her rapier right, and the first of the two zealots immediately cleaved in from the opposite direction. It saw an opening and believed its foe to be defenseless.

The Demacian immediately ducked left, completing the feint. The

zealot swing was now obviously going to overshoot the target. To compensate for this, the large automaton tried to reverse the direction of its sword mid-swing, hoping beyond hope to catch its target.

The duelist swept in the opposite direction again before launching a devastating lunge. Her sword lodged firmly through the zealot's forehead , killing the creature instantly.

The second zealot righted itself and tried for a downward cleave at the same moment the duelist stabbed the first. In response, the woman left the sword and leaped around the impaled automaton, using it as a shield. The sword smashed down and ripped through the carapace of the mech, tearing through the steel with efficiency.

With a leap the duelist emerged, snatching up her rapier while the other's sword was stuck in the ground. She thrust towards its chest once " twice " three times " knocking the zealot back as she did so. Without letting up, the duelist sent out another barrage of rapier-thrusts, until the mech's chest was a pock-marked crater.

One final stab impaled it through its mechanical heart, ending its existence.

Kolminye blinked. The entire fight had taken just minutes. Kayle had taken off at some point, running down the rangers that had been fighting the other soldiers.

Fiora turned to Kolminye. An explosion sounded off in the background.

"Zat was good, no?"

Fiora's thick accent made Kolminye cringe. She didn't like accents very much. Or cockiness. She didn't like that either.

"Shall we go?" The way Fiora said it made it sound less like a question and more like a demand.

The high councilor turned to the two other soldiers, who were panting hard. "You two will " "

"Stay in the back while we lead," Kayle finished. She unclipped two red vials from her waist belt and handed them over to the soldiers.

"Yes," Kolminye agreed warily. That wasn't what she had been about to say at all.

She really was out of her element.

Another explosion sounded.

"We are leaving," the Summoner announced. She set off without waiting to see if anyone was following. Of course, Fiora was the first to match her pace, so as not to be outdone.

A groan of metal. The floor beneath them began to twist.

A flash of light from up ahead alerted the group to an open

doorway.

They ran for it as fast as possible while the floor collapsed beneath them.

* * *

><p>Something was pinging off of his armour. A lot of somethings, actually " it sounded like staccato rainfall.<p>

Everything seemed to be moving around him, too, as if he was in an elevator or something. Large pieces of debris were being carried down with him, along with flailing mechanical bodies.

It took him a few seconds to realize that he was falling. Falling very fast, very quickly.

The Master Chief turned his head to face downwards. All he could see was rushing darkness, with no indicator of depth. It was not like it really mattered what awaited at the bottom; a fall from here would spell instant death.

He tried blink-clicking a few options on his HUD, but true to his predictions everything was still rebooting from the power surge. Everything must have been shorted out.

The best he could do was spread his limbs and slow down his descent while he searched for a way to stop. It was proving difficult, though; while the smaller pieces of debris merely pinged off his armour, the larger ones hit with heavy force.

A series of fires burst into existence like flares in the night, illuminating small portions of the room for brief seconds. It didn't help the Chief see the bottom of the pit, or anything like a ledge that he could grab on to.

A sudden clanging alerted the Chief, making him look upwards. He saw the massive metal pillar descend from the darkness above, friction causing sparks to fly off like fireworks whenever it came into contact with the pit walls.

It would certainly hit him.

He considered his options. He could angle his body and go into a dive, increasing his rate of descent and possibly out-falling the pillar. It would be much harder to arrest his fall later on, though. Alternatively, he could allow the pillar to catch up to him and try to swing around onto the object. It might provide him with enough stability to find a better way out, although there was no guarantee it was structurally sound.

A sudden harsh light lit up the darkness. The large reactor that ran the height of the chamber lit up once more, bright green lights racing up its sides.

The reactor should be offline. Was this just a power surge? A terminal failure? A fail-safe?

Was it about to explode?

The light grew ever harsher as it travelled upwards. A distinctive whine could be heard, sounding much like the build-up of a plasma charge. Heat radiated away from the central pillars in waves, causing a mirage-like effect in the air.

Definitely about to explode.

His choices were limited at the moment. His best chance would be to use the falling branch to shield himself from the worst of the blast. Of course, he would need to avoid being hit by loose pieces of metal, and somehow try to hold on to the rapidly-deteriorating structure.

The Chief angled his body, so as to get into a better position to grab the falling branch.

The branch fell steadily, drawing dangerously close to the Chief.

He reached out, the tips of his fingers almost in range to brush a metal strut.

A metal plate the size of a warthog came whipping out of the darkness above, slamming into the Chief before he could dodge. He was thrown of course, knocked away from the large falling metal structure.

Chief swore.

He looked to the reactor, which was still steadily gathering power. It would explode in the next ten seconds, if the Chief's calculations were correct.

Blue light blinded his vision. For a brief second he assumed the reactor had just gone critical, but remembered its power was green-coloured, not blue.

He looked at himself, warily examining the three blue rings that coalesced around his spread-eagle boyd.

Chief drew his limbs in together, and the rings tightened around him.

Larger pieces of metal hurtled towards him from above. The green light reached its peak.

Vertigo.

Nausea.

A sense of being torn apart and then reassembled.

* * *

><p>If one were in Piltover, looking at the skyline of Zaun, they would have been perplexed to see the buildings sink an inch into the ground, as if everything was sinking. They would not be far off, either.<p>

The shock-wave from the mock Halo collapse spread out far, affecting the entire bay. Boats were thrown wild and the waves began to rage

like some eldritch creature had control of them.

The sky turned cloudy and smoky, with hints of lightning in the midst.

In fact, it seemed almost like an end-of-the-world scenario.

And then, just as abruptly as it came, it stopped.

* * *

><p>Riven sat down heavily on the large rock. Or maybe it wasn't a rock - it looked a bit too detailed for something natural. It could have been a piece of city debris, but at this point it no longer mattered.<p>

It was just a convenient resting place.

Her sword was lying where she dropped it, just a little ways away from her. The black automaton blood - or oil, or... Whatever - that had gathered on it was impossible to make out.

She thought there was a message in that, but for the life of her she couldn't figure out what it was. Not that she was really trying to; she was far too tired for that.

She had, along with the Noxians, cut their way through the enemy counter-offensive and had secured the ports leading into the facility.

Fully half of the Noxian army was alive to reach it. Everyone else... Well, at least Noxus honoured their dead.

As she watched them pay their respects to the deceased, she only felt relief. She hadn't been ready to lose another team. One time had been too many.

The rest of the troops had organized the scared and absolutely confused Zaunites, Riven had fretted over her friends. It wasn't until later that she had found out they were okay.

Yasuo and Graves had, along with their respective armies, broken into a series of deployment chambers. Automaton had been arranged in ranks inside, apparently waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

The fighting had been hard, as was evident by Graves' broken arm and Yasuo's million-and-a-half cuts. Nonetheless, their battle managed to stall out automaton reinforcements, saving a massive amount of lives.

They were somewhere in the area, Riven knew. The two of them had needed serious medical attention, so they had been practically dragged away before she could have a decent conversation with them.

Thresh had emerged from the battle unscathed, although that was predictable. Being a spectral creature had those perks.

Not that Riven was eager to become one.

Thresh and the Demacian soldiery had broken through the sub-station's defenses, easily the most defended location on the surface of Zaun. They had managed to get quite far into the structure itself, causing the facility-wide power outage, before the entire thing had collapsed and forced them out.

The Master Chief was currently missing, although Kolminye insisted he was alive. She didn't say how she knew, but she seemed firm in that belief. She wasn't as worried as she expected herself to be, though. She was certain he could survive the facilities collapsed. He had lived through worse, after all. And it wasn't like she could go out looking for him, considering everything had collapsed.

Heavy footsteps alerted Riven to the presence of another person, but she didn't bother to look around. She did look up, however, when the piece of city-debris next to her unexpectedly split in half.

The Master Chief was on the ground, two halves of a split stone beside him.

He shook his head. "I did not expect that."

Riven tried to hold in a chuckle.

Chief stood up, his motions slower than they usually were. He seemed tired, fatigued; whatever had happened in the facility must have taken a great deal out of him.

"Chief!"

A quick over-the-shoulder glance revealed Reighlen, frantically running and trying to avoid tripping over his robes.

"Chief," he panted out, "you left me!"

"Sorry," Chief replied, although Riven noted that he did not sound very sorry. "I trust Kolminye wasn't too hard on you?"

"Not at all," the boy said with a rapid shaking of his head. "She was very supportive of my use of summoning magic. She just asked that I didn't drain all the local Nexus' reserves next time I try to do it."

"You used all the magic here?" Riven asked, incredulous. It wasn't easy to channel so much magic at one time, and it was even more impressive to drain a Nexus entirely. It took a significant amount of time for that magic to charge up again.

"Yeah! I had to summon the Chief, but he was really far away, so it took some time to concentrate!" the boy trailed off, fidgeting.

"You did well," Chief reassured him. "I wouldn't have survived without your help."

Reighlen suddenly turned red. The sight made Riven smile.

Riven looked away. "Not to be cliché, but... Is it over?"

The Chief didn't answer for a long moment. He glanced back at Zaun, looking at it hard, as if he was searching for something that he wasn't certain he could find.

"It's over," he confirmed at last.

* * *

><p>The Institute of War, one week after the battle of Zaun

* * *

><p>The High Councilor flipped through her massive log book, the thick pages pushing the air around as they were moved.<p>

The re-construction of Piltover and Zaun was to be a combined effort by the allied armies, but all the logistics fell onto her shoulders regardless. That was her job as High Councilor of the League of Legends, after all.

She picked up her inked-smothered quill and quickly scrawled down a series of characters next to the 'food' header. Food would be one of the hardest things to move around, since the war had made that commodity somewhat scarce in the northern part of Valoran.

She could ask Gangplank and his fellow pirate captains if they would import food from Bilgewater and the other isles, but she wasn't quite sure if she could trust them to do so.

She scoffed mentally. War could bring everyone together, but once it was doneâ€|

A few more pages were flipped through, and Kolminye made notes in the margins. Her eyes flicked away from the thick cream-coloured sheets for a brief moment, resting on the small piece of paper lying haphazardly on the corner of her desk.

She ripped her eyes away and re-focused on the page in front of her. She dipped her quill once more into the ink â€" a completely unnecessary action, as it was still smothered in the black liquid â€" and jotted down more notes.

Her eyes flicked back to the paper.

She sighed and reached out for it with her empty hand, lightly grasping the thin paper. She set her quill down on its stand and, with swift and precise motions, opened it up. Dozens of fold-lines marred its surface, evidence that it had been read and resealed a dozen times. Tiny black script covered every inch of its surface, leaving almost none of the white background visible.

It was a list of casualties.

The entire list was hidden to the other factions â€" they only knew their own dead. Kolminye had the entire roster, though. It was supposed to be for logistic purposes. After all, the High Councilor's job was to keep everything and everyone in line. Keeping track of everyone's armies was the best way to do that.

Kolminye had pored over the list a dozen times, and a dozen times again. The amount of people that had died wasâ€|

She had tried to distance herself, but she couldn't. She felt responsible â€" is she had just taken the proper precautions, taken serious the now-so-obvious signsâ€|

A knock at the door startled Kolminye out of her reverie. The paper dropped to the floor as she tried to straighten herself.

"It's open," she called out, and reached her out for her quill.

The Master Chief walked in, his footsteps too quiet for someone of his size and stature. His helmet was on, his armour just as battle-worn as ever. Compared to everyone else that had gone through the final battle, he seemed no worse for wear.

"Sit," she offered, waving her free hand as she dotted out more notes.

The Chief shifted, and it appeared as if he was about to refuse her offer. He tilted his head for a moment, and he appeared to be looking at the ground near Kolminye's desk.

Kolminye knew what he was looking at.

Chief nodded once, and took a seat directly opposite to her. The chair only groaned slightly, but it was still enough to earn a frown from the High Councilor. She would have to have it sent back in to the carpenters.

"You summoned me?" Chief asked, his voice low and gravely.

Kolminye tilted her head. "Yes. You provided us with a great service, and we â€" the leaders of Valoran â€" have been unable to decide on what your reward should be. More land, riches, royaltyâ€|"

She shrugged. "None of it seemed enough. We have come to the decision the simple reward would serve best. Your contract with the Institute has been voided. Congratulations, Spartan. You're going home."

The Chief became even more still in his chair, if such a thing was even possible.

"You don't seem as pleased as I though you would be," Kolminye said with a tilt of her head.

"I don't quite understand," Chief said hesitantly. "How did you manage to find my home universe with everything that has been happening?"

Kolminye blinked. "It hasâ€| The magic requirements were immense, and at the time there was no priority to â€" "

"You didn't want to send me back while you could still use me," Chief concluded, his voice totally even.

The high Councilor smiled thinly. "You make it sound worse when you say it like that."

"I'm not sure it could sound any worse than what it is," the Chief said quietly. He moved his head to the left, peering around Kolminye in order to see out the large, circular window.

The silence stretched on for a long while. The High Councilor waited for the Chief to speak, to immediately jump at the chance to be home again. Eventually she got bored, and the room once again sounded with the scratching of her quill.

"High Councilor," Chief said.

She glanced up, briefly, but focused on her notes. She was more than capable of multi-taski-

"Kolminye."

Her head shot up fast enough to cramp it. The Spartan had never called her by her first name - he was always professional about it. Always.

"There is still a lot left to do here," he said at last, his words coming out almost agonizingly slow. "Stanwick's automatons did not all shut down, some of his augmented soldiers survived, and his magicians went missing in their entirety."

He paused, allowing Kolminye to pour over his words.

"It is my duty to protect humanity," Chief said haltingly. "...wherever they may be."

"Unfinished business to take care of, is that it?" Kolminye raised an eyebrow, her gaze steely and piercing.

"I understand my being here has the potential to cause more harm than good," the Chief replied, "and it has, but I'd like to think it has also done some good. I would like to continue on in that capacity, until things have returned to a suitable balance."

Kolminye pinched the bridge of her nose and sighed. "You're making this so much harder than it has to be."

Chief looked straight at her. Kolminye could see herself reflected in his golden visor - her pale face, her eyes with their host of black bags, her lank and lifeless hair.

"Everyone else will -"

"You don't have quite enough magic yet to send me home," Chief suggested. "So you decided to send me in to liberate more nexus' and inhibitors. And I believe I still have a... Plot of land to take care of. And a title."

The High Councilor of the League of Legends was silent for a long minute.

"I see we are going to need a new contract, then," she concluded. "_Lord _Master Chief."

"I'm proud of you, Chief," Cortana said. She had abandoned all pretence of privacy and was using the external comms, much like she

had in the old days. "I mean lord Chief."

Chief simply huffed. "We talked. I asked. That's it."

"I know," Cortana said patiently, "but a step is a step."

"And don't call me lord. That sounds dumb."

His A.I giggled.

They were silent as they moved through the hallways of the Institute. Anything and everything that could possibly be labeled as 'rubble' had been removed, making it much like it had been before.

They had to repair the damage, though. Burn-holes and cut-marks adorned the cracked walls. Scorch marks were evident, as well as the tell-tale signs of bullet holes. A few times the Chief even noticed some scars of his own making.

"Plus, it's so nice to see you caring about your friends," Cortana's voice said far too suddenly.

"Cortana," Chief warned. It was a half-hearted warning, if he was being perfectly honest with himself. Truth was, he did care about his make-shift blue team. While they were no where near as effective as the original, they did the job well. He had been nearly devastated to learn they had been wounded in the fighting.

Really, he had just grown fond of this whole place in general. He understood that his place was back with the UNSC, but he couldn't leave this place with unfinished business. Or without getting to know his fellow Champions a tiny bit better.

He did not mind calling this place 'home' for a little while longer.

The main foyer was covered with wooden lattices and neatly-stacked piles of marble bricks. Quite predictably, this was the first place to feel the touch of reconstruction.

Builders turned around to gawk as the Chief walked by. At some point in the past, the Chief would have ignored them as he went about his duties. This time, he greeted them with a nod.

Riven was waiting for him in the lobby, perched against a wood-surrounded pillar.

"Thank you for waiting," the Spartan told her as he drew near.

"No problem," Riven answered, her voice low. "What did she want to talk about?"

"Noth - the usual."

"Ah." Riven chuckled. "Are we going up to the cafeteria now?"

"I have another matter to attend to first," the Chief said, gazing out at the open lobby doors.

"Okay. We should probably be quick, though," she said. "Graves isn't

very patient."

Chief looked at her for a moment, before letting out a tiny chuckle.

The town - Chief still couldn't think of it as a city - had, of course, suffered far worse than the Institute had. Entire buildings had been destroyed, and some sections of the settlement were completely gone. Surprisingly, casualties had been rather light. The Institute had some decent security protocols, even if they had been unable to stop the event in the first place.

The pair walked down the main street, avoiding potholes and crates of reconstruction supplies. People were out and about, trying to regain some of the purpose they had before the unexpected attack.

Of course, the stares continued.

He nodded a few times, and Riven gave out a few, reluctant smiles.

Luckily, the place they had to go to was not very far from the institute itself. In fact, it was directly down the main street from it, in a former (and familiar) restaurant.

It had been cleared out of rubble, which basically meant it was now a big empty space - perfect, according to Viktor, for a temporary machine shop.

And so that was what the pair walked in to. A large room, pieces of burnt wood pushed to the walls, with dozens of devices scattered about. Tables were arranged haphazardly, lacking any semblance of order but somehow still suitable for the workers. And, in the center of the room like the crowning piece, was a pelican drop-ship.

A wrench flew out of the shadows and landed on the floor not two paces from the Chief. It was quickly followed by a series of small rods and one pump-looking object.

"Viktor's been working non-stop on the pelican," The enforcer of Piltover said as she wiped her greasy hands with an equally greasy rag. "He loves the damn thing."

"It is pretty awesome," Ezreal called out from his spot atop the Pelican's right wing.

"Can you try actually try and get some work done?" Vi shouted at up at the explorer. He shrugged and ducked out of sight.

"See, he's pretending to work while in actuality he's just messing shit up." Vi sighed and turned her attention back to the pair, a glint in her eyes as she looked at Riven. "Anyways, what brings you around, Chief?"

"I had a request to make of Professor Heimerdinger," he said while Riven shuffled nervously. "Is he ar-"

"I am - " the Professors high-pitched words cut the Chief off before abruptly stopping. A mountain of small pelican parts collapsed as a small and bright yordle smashed into it, sending pieces tumbling

about.

"THIS IS WHY WE CAN'T HAVE NICE THINGS," Viktor roared at Heimerdinger, who was shuffling around the pile.

Of course, the yordle totally ignored him and continued on his way to the Spartan.

"Master Chief, so happy to see you! Did you come to help us with our work?"

"No, not exactly," Chief explained. "I have a request."

"What is it?" Vi asked as Heimer nodded his head enthusiastically.

"I was wondering if i could get some repairs to my armour... And Cortana."

Heimer's eyes widened. "You would allow us to look at your gear?"

Chief nodded. "Cortana will lock down any private files and systems, though."

"Fine fine fine fine!" The revered Inventor's enthusiasm was astonishing. "This will create amazing leaps in our technology!"

"Right..." Cortana muttered.

"If this is the case, would you be willing to help me create he perfect -"

"No," Chief said, stopping Viktor's thoughts before they could get too far.

"Eh," Viktor sighed. "It does not hurt to ask."

The Chief reached around to the back of his helmet, made a swift motion, and triumphantly held Cortana's chip.

"I'll come back as soon as you're feeling better," he told her.

"I know," Cortana replied. She had no visual representation, since there were no holoprojectors around, but the blue light dancing across the chip was just fine for the Chief. "You always keep your promises."

He handed the chip to VI, who took it almost reverently. He unlocked his helmet and pulled it off while saying, "if you break it, you buy it."

They left once Chief had completely removed his armour and changed into civilian clothes.

He had yet to decide if said clothes were indeed more comfortable than his armour, as Riven had suggested. He honestly prefer to wear his armour, though.

Construction crews were starting to put up frames around ruined buildings, ready to begin the re-construction efforts.

Riven kicked a rock out of the way, drawing his attention. "I thought you never wanted anyone to touch your armour because of classified materials or something."

"Classified files, yes," the Chief nodded. "But it needs some repairs, and I imagine i'll be here for some time."

"Ah." Riven fell silent.

"You wanted to try my helmet on, did you not? When I get it back you are more than welcome to." Chief paused in thought. "Though I may have to hold it for you since you lack a reinforced skeleton."

"Y-you, ah, remembered that?" Riven asked.

"Yes," the Chief replied honestly.

"I didn't think you'd let... Well, you know."

"I trust you," the Chief replied immediately. "More so than most."

Riven nodded, and the Chief noted her face got a more red. In his armour, he had not felt the cold weather, but he hadn't thought it was cold enough for such a bodily reaction.

"Well, see," Riven's words came out in a stutter, most likely because she was biting her lip. "Cortana said that you don't, uh..."

"When've you been speaking to Cortana?" The Chief asked, bemused. It wasn't like she could run away from his person, since she was effectively stranded in his armour.

"Good morning!" A friendly, deep voice shouted.

"Mornin', Jayce," Riven greeted first, a tiny bit to fast.

"Good morning," Chief said a heartbeat later.

"Coming to help with the construction efforts?" Jayce asked as he hefted two wooden beams.

"Unfortunately not," Chief said. "We have other business to attend to."

Riven nodded. "Say, why aren't you in the factory shop thing with the other builders?"

Jayce shrugged. "Minor disagreements," he said simply. "Well, anyways, i'll be off!"

"... I think he enjoys building things too much," Riven said.

"It would explain the broad head," Chief said.

Riven stopped and stared.

"...is something wrong?" The Spartan asked.

"Are you suggesting something fell on his head?"

"...yes," Chief answered, still perplexed.

"You tried to make a joke, didn't you?"

"...I joke ... Sometimes."

Riven tried and failed to stifle a laugh. "Ohmygods you actually tried without any sarcasm."

Chief blinked. "I'm not sarcastic."

"Right," Riven said agreeably.

"...hm."

They walked in companionable silence.

"What were you saying earlier?" Chief tried bringing up their previous conversation.

"I-don't worry about it," she said with a smile. "We can talk about this another time."

The Chief briefly wondered what 'this' was, but he had the tiniest of inklings as to what it could be.

He found he did not mind the thought.

They walked on.

The weather was pleasantly cool, the Chief decided. It felt nice, though he disliked being without his armour.

They made it back into the institute in good time, and proceeded to move towards the cafeteria. They passed by a few Champions along the way, but for the most part everything was silent - bar the repair efforts, of course. Most of the league fighters had returned to their homes, trying to help out with the myriad after-war problems.

Kolminye had, in a rare gesture of leniency, allowed this by suspending league matches for a period of time. Not too long, of course, but just enough to settle lingering matters.

It made the building seem too... Lonely, Chief thought. While the place wasn't always hustle-and-bustle, it still held the potential, the lingering promise of social activity.

The corridor to the cafeteria was more beat-up than many of the other corridors, but if nothing else it added character to the place.

The doors were open, which - while out of the norm - was not entirely unexpected.

They walked in, and were greeted with the sight of a barely intact room. Only two glass windows remained intact and allowed light into the room; the rest had been shattered and were now boarded

up.

Many of the floor tiles were cracked into piece, making the floor rather uneven in some places. There were also heavy scorch marks and a few bullet holes as well.

Fresh tables seemed to have been sent in, almost certainly to replace all the ones destroyed in the fighting.

The memory of the Chief using one as cover flashed across his mind.

The tables had been clustered near the center of the room, away from bits and pieces of stone and marble.

Some of the tables were taken up by tired-looking Champions, nibbling away at various foodstuffs.

Despite the Institute being in shambles, there was still plenty of food.

Miss Fortune was in one corner, sipping away at some drink. The Chief had not had the pleasure of fighting alongside her, but apparently she had led her various ships along the Piltover-Zaun bay and cleared up the remaining automaton forces. They had also helped in evacuating Noxian forces, apparently.

Nasus was sitting the furthest away from everyone, reading a scroll as an untouched bagel lay beside him. He had been called to the desert by his Emperor, and there they had cut off automaton supply lines. Apparently they had been digging up precious metals there.

A bar stool had been claimed by Leona. He could only see her back, but her long red hair and golden armour was a dead give-away. He wasn't quite sure how she or the other Rakarthians had contributed to war efforts, but he was sure that violent tribe had made more than one automaton bleed.

Annie and a bandaged-wrapped boy were sitting close to the center, giggling and drinking out of teacups. Annie had come in handy during the fighting, though the idea of an innocent child in war was unpleasing.

Tristana the yordle and the blue-skinned Evelyn were also sharing a table - sort of. It looked more like Tristana had jumped onto the seat and started talking the others ear off.

As far as the Chief knew, the shadow isle inhabitants - with Thresh being the obvious exception - had stayed far away from the fighting. Most likely, they had waited to see who would win.

The yordles had declared neutrality, of course. However, some automaton convoys had gone missing in the jungles near their area. Rumor was that Bandle city had organized covert op strike teams but, of course, there was little proof for that. Beyond the obvious littering of darts.

And then there was the center table. Someone had shoved two rectangular tables together to make one large one - most likely Yasuo's idea.

The table was almost entirely full - there was Graves, calmly rubbing his cigar in a half-full ashtray. Yasuo was staring hungrily at a bread roll on his plate... For some reason. Thresh was sitting completely calmly and in perfect posture, as was his norm. Irelia and Kayle were also at the table, which was a tad odd. Irelia sat somewhat close to Yasuo, while Kayle sat far away from everyone else, probably for wing space.

And... Draven. Draven in a red suit.

"Why are you here?" Riven asked at once, not even attempting to soften her words.

"Isn't it the greatest?" Draven started, oblivious to Riven's tone. "I thought I'd drop by for some relaxation with my bestest buddies."

Irelia exchanged looks with Yasuo. Graves grimaced.

"So what your saying is Darius sent you away so you wouldn't mess anything up," the Chief concluded.

Draven, rather comically, nearly fell off his chair. Most likely out of surprise at the correctness of Chief's words.

"Hurry 'n sit," Graves said gruffly. "I'm hungry."

Chief allowed Riven to sit down first before following suit. Some small dishes were laid out on the table, but there wasn't nearly enough food for everyone.

As if reading his thoughts, Irelia said, "food will be here shortly. The cook is merely finishing up."

Riven nodded in understanding. Chief asked "Which chef? As far as I know, the food is -"

"Food's ready!" Pantheon shouted as he walked out from the kitchen, carrying a dozen platters on his shield as if it were a trolley.

Chief paled.

Platters were spread around, and everyone started piling food onto their plates. Pantheon brought over another two chairs and took a seat along with Leona.

Chief's plate stayed empty.

"Arn't you going to eat?" Riven asked him, a mountain of food in her plate.

"I... I'm not that hungry," the Chief said.

Riven's brow furrowed. "Pantheon's cooking isn't that bad."

"It's not the cooking, it's the lack of sanitation."

"Chief," Riven said patiently. "You're a super-soldier that just fought an automaton army. You can handle a bit of food." She brought her plate close to Chief's and moved some food onto it. "Try this, this is good."

"I... Thank you," Chief said.

"So!" Yasuo called out for everyone's attention. "I was thinking we should start out this celebratory feast with a toast to-

"-Draaaaaven! -"

Yasuo didn't miss a beat. "-The Master Chief, for single handedly ending Stanwick's reign of terror!"

Nods of affirmation went around the table, even from Draven.

"It wasn't me," Chief interrupted. "I was there, yes, but I wasn't the one to stop him."

"But I thought you stopped the big cannon?" Pantheon asked.

"He did, but those are two entirely different things," Leona said to her fellow tribesman.

"I thought you did," Yasuo said, faltering a little in the face of the revelation.

"Someone else did," Chief told him. "An... acquaintance of ours."

"And you are sure Stanwick died?" Ireliia asked, leaning forwards.

"Our acquaintance would not have allowed his target to walk away alive," Chief assured them.

He looked away. "...and no one could have survived the explosion anyways."

Yasuo slowly slid back into his seat.

Chief spoke up. "I think another toast is in

order. Our victory was not a singular effort, but a combined struggle by people who would normally otherwise kill each other."

Various looks were shot around the table.

"So..." The Chief trailed off as he struggled to think of an end for his mock-speech.

He wasn't very good at those.

"We should toast to friendships made, hardships endured, and for humanity's preservation," Thresh concluded. "...That is what you

meant to say, no?"

"That's exactly it," Chief said as he raised his glass. "For humanity."

Everyone else raised their glasses - mostly a mix of different juices, except for dark liquids Graves and Yasuo held up - echoed the words, and drank.

The glasses thudded back against the table. While everyone else had taken sips of their beverages, Graves had drained his in its entirety.

"We had some good times, didn' we?" Graves muttered, holding his empty glass with both hands.

"Yeah, we did," Riven affirmed.

"I can honestly say that, despite not being in your team, you all did great." Leona emphasized her words with meaningful looks to Blue Team.

"Totally awesome," Draven said with a wide smile.

There was a small silence before Pantheon spoke up. "Does it not seem rather empty around?"

"Everyone has left, remember?" Irelia said to him.

"I understand that," Pantheon told her, "I mean... Beyond the lack of people, you know what I mean?"

"Yes," Chief said, remembering his own thought from earlier.

A few glances were sent his way.

"There is a distinctive lack of soul-residue," Thresh informed them, his head tilted in such a way that it appeared as if he was tasting the air.

"People have to leave, sometimes," Yasuo said, taking another mouthful of his alcohol. "But they always come back in the end."

"Those are some smart words," Graves said.

Yasuo thanked him.

"...especially coming from you," Graves finished.

"Aw, c'mon," the Ronin protested.

"When will you be leaving, Spartan?"

Kayle had not spoken until that point, and the Chief had almost forgotten her presence at the table.

Almost.

"I..."

Everyone looked at him with their full and undivided attention.

Riven shifted beside him.

"I swore an oath to the UNSC that I would protect Earth and all its colonies," Chief explained. "And I plan to see that through to the end.

"However, I also have a contract to fulfil here first. I have to return to my dimension one day, but not just yet. And, like Yasuo said, I'll be sure to come back once I do.

"So yer stayin', huh?" Graves said, cutting right to the point.

"Yes," Chief concluded. "If you'll have me."

"Of course, Chief," Riven assured.

"Really, you could have just said 'yes' right off the bat and skipped the speech," said Yasuo. He was buttering up another bread roll, but it was quickly snatched away by Draven.

"If you left, then there'd be no one on my skill level," Draven said as he ate Yasuo's bread roll. "And that'd be a problem."

"Oh? One-v-one me right now, Howling Abyss," Yasuo shouted out.

Irelia pulled the Wanderer back as Kayle said, "I believe the arenas are still closed."

"Ah, there are still the battle-pits of rakarth," Pantheon said aloud.

"Hah! Let's go, Draven!"

"I have waaaaay too much style for you."

The Chief chuckled around a mouthful of food. It was almost... Relaxing to hear everyone bicker like this. It felt normal.

"What'ya think, Chief?"

"Think of what?" Chief asked Graves, unsure of what he had been asked and entirely unwilling to say anything until he was.

"Who would win? Yasuo or Draven?" Thresh explained.

"Well..." Chief began, "I've seen Yas fight countless times in countless situations, while I've only seen Draven fight a handful of times."

Yasuo smiled.

"Which is why I can say with some confidence that Yasuo would lose," Chief finished.

Yasuo was shocked. "W-what the hell?!"

"You just got destroyed," Graves said in his classic drawl, as he rolled a fresh cigar. "By the Chief, no less."

"John."

"I beg your pardon?" Thresh asked.

"My name is John. I thought you all deserved to know."

"Wait, your given name _isn't _Master Chief?" Draven exclaimed, seemingly stunned at the relation.

Kayle knocked him on the back of the head. "Is there even a brain in there?"

"John," Riven said, rolling the word around as if to test it. "John. Yeah, it works."

"I don't -"

"Draven! Keep your hands off my food!" Yasuo stood up.

"Why don'tcha make me?"

Yasuo threw himself at the Glorious Executioner.

Riven watched the two with a look of idle curiosity, as if the sight was something she had anticipated but wasn't quite certain how it would play out.

"Should we stop them?" She asked.

Irelia rose up to stop Yasuo as Kayle moved to stop Draven. Pantheon started cheering them on, at least until Leona began lecturing him. Graves and Thresh exchanged looks and began to bet on which would be the victor.

"...No," John said. "I... Think i'd rather sit here and enjoy present company."

Riven scraped her chair slightly closer to him. "This does have a sort of charm, doesn't it?"

"I wouldn't trade it for the world," John said, a promise and a commitment all in one.

He smiled.

Kayle, by some chance, caught the Spartan's eye for the briefest of moments. She smiled too, gave him a knowing nod, and focused back on her charge.

He could not shirk his duty, as he had told the angel so long ago. But he believed he understood what she had tried to tell him oh-so-long ago.

His duty would be finished, in this world and the other, that was for certain. But enjoying the normal things, being with the people he was

performing his duties for - well, it wasn't all that bad.

He had sufficient time to do what he had to do.

For now...

Well, for now John-117, the Master Chief, was content to simply be with friends.

* * *

><p>Elsewhere

The last time he had seen her was yesterday, early morning. She had a three-day patrol shift, and he had the time off. He couldn't go with her, of course. That was against protocol.

So he had stayed at home, trying to prepare the nicest dinner he could manage without ruining anything.

And then the storm had happened.

The trees were listing badly, the wind tearing at them as if to pull them in the same way a man would pull potatoes from the ground.

The rain was pounding down hard, turning the badly-paved stone road into a small pool.

It was hard to see, so the man could not be sure where any of his fellows were.

That was a problem. They would need to link up, would need to try and save people from this accursed, terrible typhoon. And, of course, he would need to find her.

Except it wasn't a typhoon; not unless one was an idiot and failed to see the subtle differences.

The rain hissed as it hit stone and wood and leaves, leaving the tiniest of tiny holes in them.

The wind chafed against his skin something fierce, and it felt altogether too dry for a rainstorm.

The air, the swirling storm above, and the water in the streets was tinged the slightest hint of green.

This was artificial.

Finding the source was important, and so the man set off. It was near-impossible to see more than four paces in front of him, and he resolved to wear his helmet next time. And maybe make it all-encasing.

Yeah. That could work.

There was a suggestion of movement to his left, along the wooden ramps. Without any conscious thought he spun in that direction, bringing his crossbow up in a smooth motion.

Two figures entered his view: soldiers in bronze scale mail, green robes flapping around their waists and hooding their heads. They wore enclosing helmets with large, green goggles and strange tubes. They carried axes and bucklers.

Not his soldiers. Definitely not from this country.

He fired twice, his repeating crossbow punching through their relatively weak helms and impaling them to the wooden walls.

Moving was essential, so he continued onwards. He occasionally came across bodies of civilians, killed by the chaotic storm.

That made him upset. They were innocent, and had no reason to die.

But he didn't get upset. He never got upset.

It was getting hard to breathe, now. Every inhalation of oxygen burned his lungs and left his throat aflame.

He covered his mouth with his scarf, but the effects did not seem to lessen.

Shouts, right ahead of him. He stopped, and listened.

Sobbing came distinctly from the right. Laughing from dead center and center left. Shouting from the left.

His crossbow was up in a flash and he let loose three bolts, making sure to carefully compensate for the wind speed and drop.

Three voices stopped.

Shouts of outrage began this time, and figures moved within the fog.

His crossbow would need to be reloaded, and he lacked time for that. Instead, he reached for the one-sided knife he had been provided with.

A figure reached him, axe raised high.

He swung under the figure's guard and thrust right up between his gorget.

The figure fell.

The man moved forwards, half running. The next man that tried to reach him was cut down with two quick stabs.

A third soldier quickly retreated.

The man sheathed his knife and went down on one knee, pulling out a tube of bolts from his cloth back pack. He set it down on the ground and swiftly moved his hand to the containment lever. With a swift tug the lever pulled back, and a hiss of gas accompanied the ejection of the spent tube.

He inserted the new tube in and pulled the lever back up. He toggled

the three side-switches that regulated the gas-flow back into the forward position.

He took aim. His target was further away now (or so he assumed from the foggy shadow), so he adjusted his aim accordingly before letting loose a bolt.

The shadow fell.

The man rose up and turned to the sobbing person beside him.

He recognized her: Mira, someone who had come from overseas not two months before and who was now working at the town docks. He had visited her shop everyday; her father had brought in the freshest oysters and the strange, foreign trinkets that decorated the shelves had drawn him.

He had never really left his home, and it was like a glimpse of another world.

Rather depressing in hindsight.

"Are you okay?" He asked, concern in his voice, as he reached a gentle hand out.

She sobbed and drew her limbs in tighter. She choked a couple of times, most likely due to rapid inhalation of the terrible air.

The man looked around, and immediately went for the two dead foreigners. He tore their hoods off and searched the back of their heads for clasps.

He tore off two of their odd masks, and places one over his head.

Every suddenly became significantly clearer, although he still could not see far and it was more green-hues than before. The air no longer hurt as much either, although it still proved troublesome.

The mask also allowed him to see the dozen or so civilian bodies, a sight that made him want to retch.

He turned away quickly and moved to the girl again. "Put this on," he told her as he held the mask out. "I promise it will help."

She looked at him with teary eyes. A flash of recognition went through them (although he wasn't certain how she had ascertained his identity now that he had the mask on) and she nodded.

He took that as permission and secured the mask onto her face. "Are you okay to walk?"

"Y-yeah," she said rather shakily. Her exotic accent still intrigued him.

"Follow me closely," he said. "I'm sure everyone else is in the storm shelters."

He noted the girl tried very hard not to look at the bodies.

There were a lot.

He tried leading them down the side paths of the sprawling port city, trying to avoid more enemy patrols... And bodies.

While he wasn't grateful for the fake storm, at least it limited the amount of troops that the enemy would send in.

It was rather odd, though, that he had encountered more enemy troops than his own, or even civilians.

"Where is you father?" The man asked the Mira once he heard her rate of breathing increase.

"H-h-h went to go n-n-negotiate a trade deal," she said. "Down by the d-d-d-"

"I'm sure he's okay," the man said as compassionately as he could.

He doubted her father was fine.

"There!"

The man spun at the sound of voices. Four foreign soldiers were behind them, and one was pointing.

The the two crossbow men raised their weapons and fired.

The man was hit once, the bolt piercing through his leather armour and sticking into his side.

He grunted in pain while Mira screamed.

He took his mind off the pain and focused on getting his own weapon up.

The weapons of the foreigners took longer to reload than his did, and he two swordsman had too far to run before they could kill him. That was the only reason why he survived long enough to put all four of them down.

The next thing on his mind was getting the bolt out of his side. He gripped it tightly and, knowing it would hurt if he went slow, pulled it out in one go.

The pain was almost too much, and he half toppled over.

Through his blurry vision, he could see the girl scream and start running.

He swore.

He immediately tried to rise up and follow, limping heavily on one side. As he moved he tried wrapping his scarf around his midsection to act as a bandage and stop the bleeding. The last thing he wanted was a blood trail.

He turned a corner onto a hillside ramp.

There was a skirmish going on below. Fellow soldiers were engaged in combat against the foreigners.

It was odd, though. Why was the garrison pushed so far up to the beach? They weren't supposed to be there. Not to mention the fog was much worse around here.

He spotted Mira running towards their lines, and limped off after her.

An enemy reared out of the fog beside him, thrusting outwards with a pike.

The man tried to move aside, but his weak side gave out and he fell down on one knee. Still, it succeeded in throwing the enemy off. He raised his crossbow with one hand and let loose the last bolt, sticking the soldier right through the heart.

The man looked around. Mira was still running, and the fog was slowly obscuring her form. In a minute, he would be unable to see her.

He was also out of ammo. He took that as priority, seeing as how he was in a skirmish, and tried to reload as quickly as he could.

Once he looked up again, Mira was gone.

He swore, and moved off in the last direction he had seen her.

Fellow soldiers emerged from the smoke, moving around him like liquid. He wasn't technically supposed to be there, so they treated him as if he was invisible.

He wondered if she was here. Surly her patrol wouldn't have tried coming here, right?

The twang of a crossbow alerted the man to nearby enemy soldiers. On his right, he could see a fellow soldier drop down, two bolts in his chest, purple robes awash with blood. Two enemies were in front of him, but they were already searching for new targets.

He fired twice. Two headshots.

As much as he'd like to admire his own handiwork, he needed to continue moving.

His side was bothering him. He'd have to apply ointment as soon as he could.

Something rammed into him from the side, knocking him to the ground and doubling him over. The pain in his side intensified tenfold, making him sputter.

His assailant raised a knife up high.

The man quickly locked his legs and flipped himself, throwing his attacker to the ground in a swish of green-and-gold robes

He ignored the searing pain in his side and reached for his own knife, sheathed safely in his boot. A moment later it was buried in

the gut of his opponent, right in between the layered plates of bronze metal.

The man tried to rise up, but found that he could not. Everything was hurting too much.

"Stay with me," a female voice said.

The man looked up into the face of his fiancée.

She locked eyes with him, despite his helmet. Her fingertips glowed a relaxing purple, and she waved them over his body.

The pain immediately subsided.

"You know how this works," she said to him patiently. "It won't last long, so let's finish this up real quick and get proper treatment, ok?"

He nodded his head and got up slowly. "I was with a girl -"

His Fiancée's face scrunched up, her classic look of confusion.

"No matter," he said quickly. "We'll find her."

Her face was still scrunched up, so he knew something was bothering her.

Figures emerged from the dense fog.

He raised his crossbow, and fired. One shot went too high, but the others hit their two intended targets.

His fiancée spun around, drawing her falchion while her other hand light up blue.

The first foe to come too close was deeply cut along the torso, her blade somehow managing to rip open the bronze. The second foe was zapped to death by a stream of magical lightning, his entire body convulsing.

The man turned as more figures came in close. He had one last bolt, so he waited for his enemies to line up before firing.

The bolt punctured through three men, slaughtering them in an incredible display of skill that would have earned him marksman medal in any other situation.

Four enemies still remained.

He dropped his ranged weapon and twirled as the first spearman rushes close, grabbing the haft of the weapon and pulling hard.

He ripped it free of the soldiers grasp and the unfortunate soldier tumbled to the ground, where he was ended by the spear tip of his own weapon.

The man pulled free the weapon and twirled it around just in time to deflect another spear, aimed right for his throat. He then spun and thrust straight, breaking through the eye piece of his third

opponent.

He quickly twirled his spear into a guard position, stopping the last two enemy weapons.

A stream of lightning hit the two, flash-burning them into neat crisps.

He wanted to thank her, but more enemies were arriving. In unison they took a step towards each other, and then a step back.

A fireball flashed out of the fog, striking out towards the swordsmage. She created a golden spell wall to block the shot, rendering it harmless.

Another two flashed out, and only one was blocked.

The second slammed right into her midsection, burning through the leather and chain-mail protecting her. The force also launched her back, out into the deeper smoke.

The man yelled louder than he ever had before. He turned towards the source of the magic, still yelling.

He had the spear in one hand, but he needed another.

There was a falchion by his feet.

The blood was pounding in his ears, threatening to split his head in half. He picked the weapon up, and started running.

A cluster of mages were deeper in the smoke. Behind them was a large, bulbous machine with flickering lights.

His falchion swept down, cleaving through a green-robed magician.

His spear snapped out, slicing open an exposed throat.

Icicles of raw magic flashed through the fog, almost impossible to see.

The man raised his arm, and half a dozen small pieces embedded themselves.

The man lunged, slicing left-to-right with his sword while he thrust with his spear.

The attacking mage was unable to dodge both, and so was slain.

The man twirled the spear around. He hefted it up, ignoring the other mages and taking aim at the device.

He threw the spear with uncanny precision. It impacted directly against the crystal ball, shattering it like a glass sculpture.

A wave of force emanated from it, sending the fog roiling like an angry beast. The mages closest were torn apart by the violent pressure wave, while the others were knocked to the ground.

The man was hit badly as well, but he did not let up. He ignored his burning limbs and his now-corroding armour and stepped into the clouds, raising his falchion to finish the job.

It only took a few minutes, but each and every foreign sorcerer was dead, the destruction of the machine had greatly lessened the fog and the overall quality of the storm, leading the man to believe this was but one of many storm controllers.

He turned away and ran to where his fiancée was laying.

With the decreased fog cover it was easy to see the battlefield around him. Bodies of soldiers were piled on high, and broken weapons littered the ground. The bodies of his fellows were in fairly random locations, showing that they had not fought in formation. With the amount of fog, it was 't hard to see why.

The enemy, on the other hand, had fought properly. They had the gear to fight in these conditions, and had used it to annihilate the defenders. Many foreigners were still alive, regrouping on the sidelines.

He didn't pay them much attention.

He had found his fiancée, and the hoard of bodies around her.

They were all civilians, fallen like trees in a storm. There were a hundred at least, and probably more.

"We tried to get to the boats," his fiancée said. "Get them out of here. The fog, though..."

"Don't talk," the man said, reaching into his backpack for something to heal her. "Save your energy."

"The marshal said to let them board on their own while we tried to kill the mages. We couldn't."

The man heard screams behind him. The foreigners were going around, executing living defenders.

His fiancée took in a shuddering breath, and the man knew she was dying.

"I'm sorry," he said to her as his vision became blurry.

"Saving the innocent is our job as soldiers," she said to him, looking somewhere behind him. "I messed up. You didn't."

He turned and saw Mira, her body shaking as she cradled the body of an older man, a familiar man.

"I did not--"

"One... life for one... life," his fiancée said to him as she moved her hand to cup his masked cheek. "I...kinda like... The m-masked look, you know?"

"Do you?" He said, his voice thick with feelings that he had never expressed.

She nodded and closed her eyes.

He stared at her for long moments before carefully folding her arms across her chest. He wanted to bury her, to give her a proper send off, but with the soldiers around it was next to impossible.

He moved over to Mira, his footsteps slow and plodding.

"We have to leave," he told her as she sobbed at the body of her father.

"Why was he here?" She cried out. "He shouldn't have been here!"

"He was away from the masses," the man pointed out. "He was going to get you."

She looked up at him.

"I promise."

Foreigners started moving in their direction.

"We have to go," he urged.

"We... We can't just leave him!" She shouted, wrapping her arms around the body.

The man hoped her words were lost in the wind.

"We have to," the man said. The wind was beginning to pick up. "...we can't... We can't let their memories go to waste."

"B-but we c-can just drag him further i-inland with us," she insisted, her sobs intensifying. "Right? Right?"

"We aren't going farther inland," the man said.

"We're not?" The girl asked, her evident surprise distracting from her sobs.

"No. There are still people in the storm shelters," he said, hoping. "We need to keep them safe. Going any farther will endanger them."

"Then... Then... Where?"

The man nodded his head out to sea.

"...! We can't just! You can't just!" She struggled with her words. "You are a soldier! You can't abandon your duty to Ionia in her time of need!"

"My duty is to Ionia's people," the man said. He kneeled down until he was eye level with her. "It's people. There many, many people here I need to keep safe. If we go over land, they are in risk. If we take the bodies with us, we make slower time."

He gestured out to see where Noxian dreadnoughts were engaged in combat with faster Ionian frigates.

"There are plenty of Noxian troop transports further down that we can use to slip past them - but only while they are still distracted."

He rose up again. "Ionia lives where its people live."

The girl looked up at him.

"Plus, I think I make a pretty good mercenary, don't you?"

The girl continued to stare, unable to respond. How could she? This hadn't happened last time. Last time, they had gone off in search of the storm shelter.

The man turned back out to the open sea, where the battle between the two fleets had frozen - like a picture that a nobleman would hang on his wall.

"How long have you know?" A voice said from somewhere that wasn't here.

It's not like 'here' was real, though, so the man paid no heed to the small details.

"From the start," he said honestly. "You guys didn't do a very good job. Did you really think my memories played out like that?"

"Then why did you stay," the voice pressed.

"I wanted to see her again, one last time."

The voice was silent for a full minute. The man reached up and undid the clasps of his gas mask, letting it fall to the fading beach. He felt the strong wind on his face, and breathed deep of the ocean. He closed his eyes...

...And knew that he was back.

He opened his eyes to the darkness.

"I'll presume that I passed," the man said, making sure everything was in place.

"How did it feel to have your mind laid bare for all to see?"

He made sure his falchion was securely strapped to his waist, and tightened the various straps around his body. He was careful around the tenderer, raw areas.

No point in reopening old wounds.

"I already said: if you think my memories played out like that, then you're truly stupid. And in for a surprise."

There was a sudden, devastatingly bright vertical light.

The doors were opening.

"You passed," the voice said as the doors opened up fully, casting

away the last shred of darkness in the reflection chamber. "Welcome to the League of Legends."

The man bent down and retrieved his primary weapon: a long-barreled sniper rifle of vaguely alien origin. .

"If there's going to be a contract," the man said out loud to whoever was listening, "then you a better abide by the rules of it. Because trust me when I say,"

The man paused as his sniper lit up a caustic green, similar to the light spilling from his mask's eye lenses

"Bad things happened to the last guy that broke it," Marin finished, and stepped into the Institute of War.

Fin

* * *

><p>Afterword!

So... this is the end. Obviously. There's a lot I didn't cover, and things I did not flesh out as much as I should have, but I wanted this story to be a straightforward development and not some elaborate scheme to tie a dozen thread together. It's just the Chief in the League, killing not-aliens and beind not afraid of anything. Aaaaaaan I kinda like open endings where the reader can decide on what they think. ;P

**That being said, this story did last a lot longer than I thought it would, and that's thanks to all of you guys. It's been a great journey (see what I did there?) and I had a hell of a lot of fun writing this for you guys. My sincerest thanks to everyone who read, reviewed, followed and liked, and my almost-as-sincere thanks to those that just read this. **

Couldn't have done this without you awesome guys. Thanks a ton!

On another note, I've been on-the-fence of this 'next story' issue and hoped you guys could help me out. See, I wanted to do an original WH40K story (the universe just seems to fun to write about) but then I saw the League of Legends PROJECT trailer. for those of you that haven't seen it, check it out. anyways, I'm undecided now as to which story I should attempt. The project one seems vaguely similar to what I've been doing up until now, so I think I can do it justice.

If anyone has any opinions, just comment or PM me. Anything is welcome!

So, one final time: Thank you, everyone, for the sheer awesomeness.

C Ya!

End
file.